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The Paradise on the Sand

Suna no Ue no Rakuen cOla

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Suna no Ue no Rakuen
Ichiko Ima

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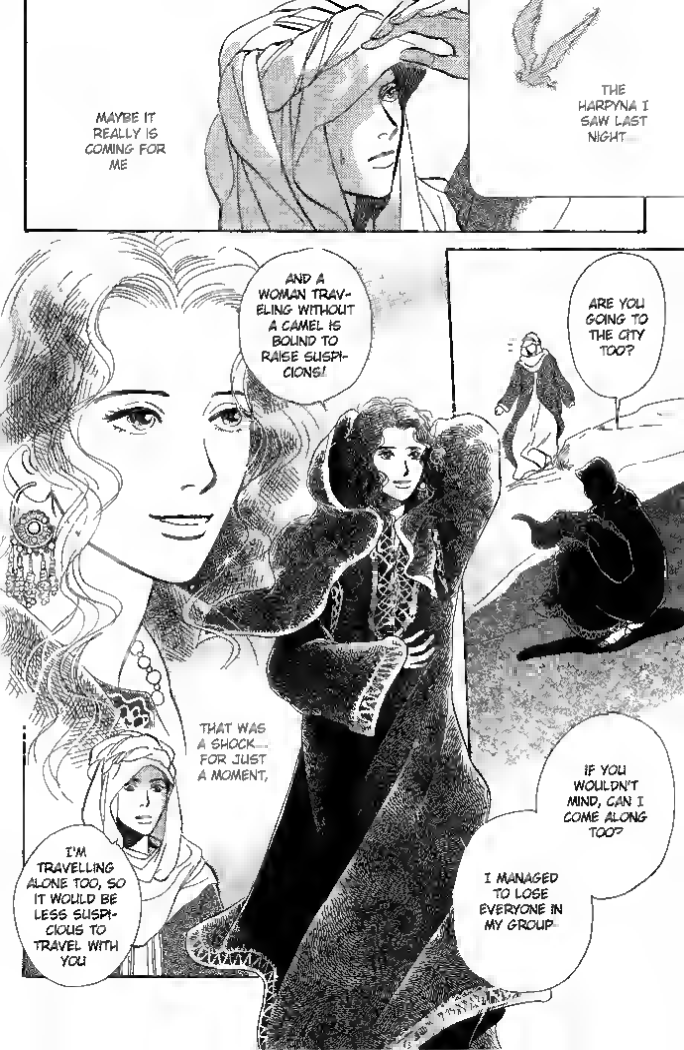
THAT'S A HARPYNA
IT'S HUGE...!
FANCY MEETING ONE OF THOSE BIRDS ON OUR JOURNEY! WHAT A BAD OMEN!
THE SO-CALLED HARPYNA BIRD... IT'S RUMORED TO TAKE AWAY THE SOULS OF DEAD HUMANS.
QUICK DUCK YOUR HEAD OR IT MIGHT STEAL YOUR SOUL!
IT'S HEADING TOWARDS MIMO CITY AS IF THE BIRD IS LEADING US THERE

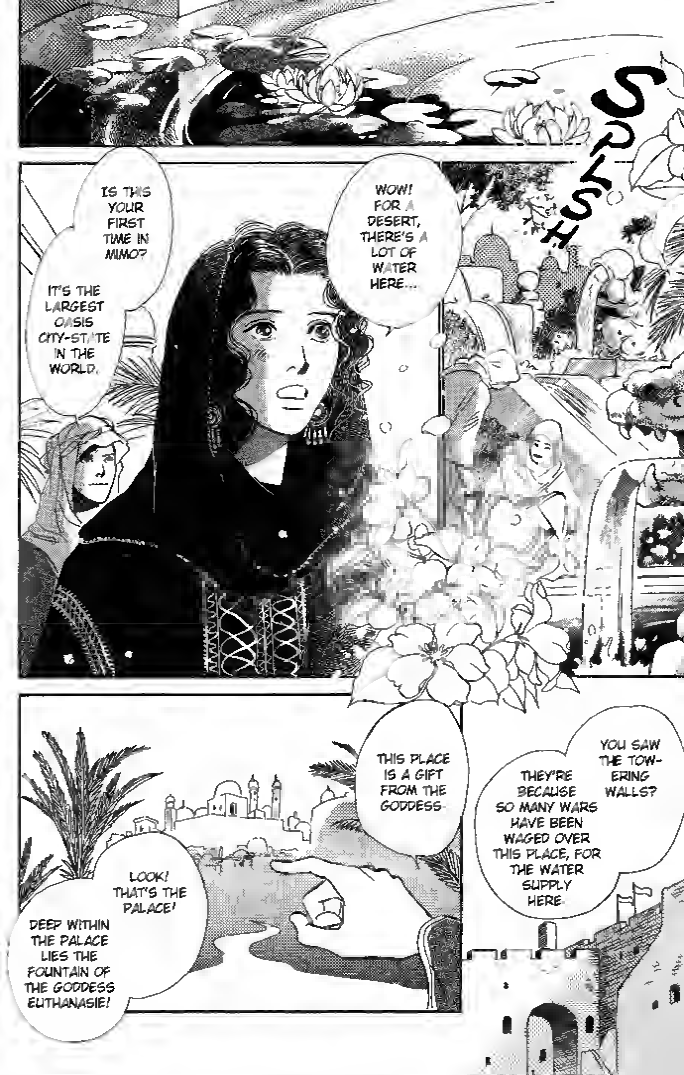
Suna no Ue
no Rakuen

MIMO! HERE WE ARE.
KHNK
THE CITY IS SURROUNDED BY FOUR WALLS, EACH FACING A CARDINAL DIRECTION. EVERY WALL HAS ONE EXIT
WE'LL BE KEEPING A LOOKOUT ON THESE TWO EXITS
WHEN IT'S ALL OVER, YOU'LL BE A FREE MAN
BUT IF YOU MANAGE TO GET BY US, BE PREPARED TO LIVE THE LIFE OF A FUGITIVE!

HA HA HA
HA HA HA
YOU'RE JUST GOING TO USE IT TO THREATEN US FOR THE CAMELS, RIGHT?
I'M NOT FALLING FOR THAT, MISTER!
THEN SPARE ME A KNIFE!
DON'T FORGET, YOU'RE A CRIMINAL!
GO FIND ONE YOURSELF!
YOU SHOULD BE THANKFUL THAT YOU STILL HAVE A SECOND WAY OUT!
THEN AT LEAST GIVE ME SOME MONEY!
HA HA HA
GET GOING! I'LL STAND GUARD HERE!
IF LADY REBIYA GIVES THE ORDER, YOUR PUNISHMENT MAYBE BE AVERTED.
BUT IF IT GOES WRONG, AND YOU GET CAUGHT... YOU'RE OUT OF LUCK.
THIS IS TOO MUCH...
BUT I DIDN'T COMMIT ANY HUGE CRIME...


MAYBE IT REALLY IS COMING FOR ME
THE HARPYNA I SAW LAST NIGHT...
AND A WOMAN TRAVELING WITHOUT A CAMEL IS BOUND TO RAISE SUSPICIONS!
ARE YOU GOING TO THE CITY TOO?
THAT WAS A SHOCK... FOR JUST A MOMENT,
I'M TRAVELLING ALONE TOO, SO IT WOULD BE LESS SUSPICIOUS TO TRAVEL WITH YOU
I MANAGED TO LOSE EVERYONE IN MY GROUP.
IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND, CAN I COME ALONG TOO?

I THOUGHT SHE WAS A HUGE BIRD
YOU'RE REALLY DARING! WHAT IF YOU'D MET A BANDIT?
I HAVE NO MONEY
I'LL TRAVEL WITH YOU, BUT...
WITHOUT CAMELS OR BAGGAGE, WE STILL LOOK LIKE A SUSPICIOUS PAIR...
SO WE'LL LOOK LIKE A COUPLE ELOPING!
LET'S GO!
step step


SPLASH
WOW! FOR A DESERT, THERE'S A LOT OF WATER HERE...
IS THIS YOUR FIRST TIME IN MIMO?
IT'S THE LARGEST OASIS CITY-STATE IN THE WORLD.
YOU SAW THE TOWERING WALLS?
THEY'RE BECAUSE SO MANY WARS HAVE BEEN WAGED OVER THIS PLACE, FOR THE WATER SUPPLY HERE.
THIS PLACE IS A GIFT FROM THE GODDESS.
LOOK! THAT'S THE PALACE!
DEEP WITHIN THE PALACE LIES THE FOUNTAIN OF THE GODDESS EUTHANASIE!

I'M LOOKING FOR SOMEONE!
HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF A MAN AROUND HERE WITH WHITE SKIN AND GOLDEN HAIR?
YES, THE GODDESS OF DEATH
EUTHANASIE?
IF YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW THAT, WHY DID YOU COME HERE?
YOU MEAN THE RINEZHI?
THEY'VE BEEN CONSIDERED ROYALS EVEN BEFORE MIMO CITY WAS BUILT.
LIVE IN THE PALACE WITH THE GODDESS FOLINTAIN THEY ALL HAVE WHITE SKIN, GOLDEN HAIR, AND EITHER GREEN OR BLUE EYES
THE RINEZHI CLAN...
She might be a demon or a ripelet.
Better not ooh back!
OH! WAIT!
I HOPE YOU FIND WHO YOU'RE LOOKING FOR! BYE...
SHE REALLY DOESN'T KNOW ANY OF THIS COMMON KNOWLEDGE!
AH...!

ARE YOU ALRIGHT? ARE YOU FEELING OKAY?
I'M... I'M FINE
RUMBLE
I JUST HAVEN'T EATEN FOR A FEW DAYS NOW, THAT'S ALL
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BOTHER ME ABOUT IT!
THEN YOU HAVE TO EAT!
I'M BROKE
YES! EVER SINCE I WAS BORN, I WAS HELD CAPTIVE BY MY STERN AND VIOLENT FATHER.
WE'RE OFF ELOPING, SO PLEASE GIVE US A GOOD PRICE FOR IT!
THIS... IS SIMPLY AMAZING!
I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A CLEAR, FLAWLESS CRYSTAL!
I'm broke too, but I have jewels!
YOU'RE AN ELDEST DAUGHTER RIGHT?
UM... I WANT TO BELIEVE YOU...
THAT'S WHY IT'S MY FIRST TIME SEEING ALL THIS, CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? THESE SIGHTS...
Sounds like something that way.
The world is soo pretty.

I'M RAISA
YOU HAVEN'T LAUGHED SO I GUESS YOU DON'T REALIZE IT
WHAT?
ASILAH IS A WOMAN'S NAME
IS THERE A REASON YOU HAVE A GIRL'S NAME?
IT'S BECAUSE I'M SOMEONE WHO SHOULD BE DEAD
I STILL DON'T KNOW YOUR NAME
MINE'S ASILAH
LET'S GO! NOW WE CAN EAT.
WITH ALL THAT MONEY, I DON'T REALLY KNOW EITHER...
WE'LL BE ABLE TO GET A MEAL AT LEAST, RIGHT?
I DON'T REALLY KNOW, IS THIS A GOOD PRICE FOR IT?
CHINK
HOW ABOUT THIS MUCH?

ARE YOU HERE TO SEE THE ROYAL MARRIAGE?
NO... I'VE BEEN IN THE DARK FOR ABOUT A HALF A YEAR NOW, SO I REALLY DON'T KNOW ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS...
THOSE ARE THE AGRA THAT'S REALLY STRANGE
THE CITY OF MIMO AND IT'S OLD ENEMY, THE AGRA, HAVE JUST SIGNED A PEACE TREATY
THAT THE NOMADIC TRIBE WOULD BE IN THE CITY THE AGRA AND THE RINEZHI ARE REALLY DEAD SET AGAINST EACH OTHER
MANY OF THE DESERT TRIBES HAVE COME HERE TO SEE THE CEREMONY THAT WILL BE HELD IN A WEEK
SO THE KING'S SON PRINCE MALI, WILL BE MARRYING THE AGRA CHIEF'S DAUGHTER.
TAKE A LOOK AT THAT SPEAR!
THAT IS THE AGRA'S CHIEF!

WHICH ONE OF THEM IS THE BRIDE?
FOURTEEN AND TWELVE... STILL CHILDREN!
I HEARD THE DAUGHTER IS ONLY FOURTEEN THIS YEAR!
AND HIS MAJESTY PRINCE MALI IS WHAT? TWELVE?
LOOK AT HOW UNREFINED THEY ARE!
THAT THE KING IS ACTUALLY ALLOWING THEM TO MARRY INTO THE ROYAL FAMILY...
SHE'LL MAKE A GREAT HOSTAGE.
THE AGRA'S HONOR IS GONE!
THEY WERE ONCE FAMOUS, THE STRONGEST NOMADIC TRIBE
NOW, FOR THE WATER HERE,
THEY WILL GIVE UP THEIR PREMIER DAUGHTER AND BECOME MERE OASIS GUARDS
IF THEY REALLY WANTED PEACE, THEY COULD HAVE THE KING MARRY HER, MAKING HER THE QUEEN!
THEY'RE ACTUALLY MAKING HER MARRY A TWELVE YEAR OLD BOY...
YOU'VE MISUNDERSTOOD

GOLDEN HAIR, GREEN EYES...
THE TRAITS OF THE RINEZHI CLAN...
THE YOUNG KING HAS BEEN SICKLY SINCE YOUTH, AND MANY DOUBT IF HE'LL LIVE TO BECOME A YOUNG MAN. BECAUSE OF THIS, HIS SUBORDINATES DO NOT HOLD ANY REGARD FOR HIM...
BUT KING AKELIA HIMSELF IS ONLY FIFTEEN...
THE KING OF MIMO TRULY HAS NO QUEEN,
IT SEEMS LIKE HE'S SOMEONE OF HIGH STATUS...
COULD HE BE AN ARISTOCRAT IN DISGUISE...?
RECENTLY, THERE'S BEEN A RUMOR THAT HE'S GIVING UP THE THRONE TO HIS YOUNGER BROTHER IF THAT'S THE CASE, WON'T SHE BECOME QUEEN?
"YOUR MAJESTY?"
ANYWAY, THE MARRIAGE DESERVES TO BE A JOYOUS AFFAIR.
I THINK IT'S TIME WE GO BACK, YOUR MAJESTY
WE'VE STAYED OUTSIDE LONG ENOUGH

I DIDN'T EXPECT TO MEET HIM HERE...
HE'S THE KING
HE'S DRESSED IN DISGUISE IN ORDER TO SEE THE AGRA TRIBE ENTERING THE CITY, AND SEE HOW THINGS ARE
THE KING OF MIMO... AKELIA HIMSELF...?
EVERYONE SHOULD AT LEAST CONGRATULATE THEM
GO AND ENJOY YOURSELF AT THE EVENT!
ASILAH, WAS THAT ONE OF THE RINEZHI?
RAISA!
LISTEN UP! FROM NOW ON, WE DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER. WE'RE STRANGERS, GOT IT!
JUST GO! DON'T COME BACK HERE AGAIN!
ASILAH?
PLEASE WAIT! YOUR MAJESTY!

FINE, WAIT! LET'S HEAR WHAT HE HAS TO SAY.
YOUR MAJ-ESTY... PLEASE JUST WAIT.
I MEAN YOU NO HARM.
STOP, WHOEVER YOU ARE!
I HAVE SOME-THING TO ASK OF YOU!
SHNK
AHH!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING—

I WANT ...
YOUR LIFE!
!BATS

RUSH
AN ASSASSIN!
AHHHH!
GRAB HIM!
DAMN!
GUARDS, WHAT ARE YOU DOING!
YOUR MAJESTY, ARE YOU OKAY!?
WHERE IS HE?
WE'VE CAUGHT HIM, AND WE'LL INTERROGATE HIM SOON.
QUICKLY! BACK TO THE PALACE ...!

ASILAH!
HOLD IT!
ARE YOU HIS ACCOMPLICE!?
DAMN! JUST KILL ME!
IDIOT ...
STUPID GIRL!
HAS THE ASSASSIN BEEN EXECUTED?
YIN L'UTER.

HOW CAN A YUBI BE AN ASSASSIN?
WHILE SERVING HIS FAMILY, A YUBI WOULD HAVE LEARNED THE SECRETS OF THE FAMILY.
A YUBI IS IN THE POSITION TO BE EITHER A SPY OR AN ASSASSIN
THE ASSASSIN IS IN PRISON AWAITING HIS FATE.
HOW CAN WE? THE WEDDING IS COMING UP, AND WE CAN'T LET IMPURE BLOOD STAIN THE GODDESS'S PURITY.
RIGHT NOW THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE FROM NEIGHBORING CITIES HERE TO SEE THE WEDDING.
HIS MAJESTY SHOULD KNOW NOT TO WALK AROUND IN PUBLIC WITH SO FEW GUARDS!
EH?
Sigh
THE GUARDS SHOULD TAKE MOST OF THE RESPONSIBILITY
...MY RESPONSIBILITY?
THE ASSASSIN DIDN'T TRY TO KEEP HIS IDENTITY A SECRET.
HE'S THE YUBI* OF OUR NEIGHBORING CITY'S CHIEF, LADY REBIYA. HIS NAME HIS ASILAH

* Someone who is in charge of writing for a wealthy, high status family

LORD HABILUSA
SO THE ASSASSIN'S A GUY?
BUT ISN'T ASILAH A GIRL'S NAME?
YOU HAVEN'T KILLED HIM YET, RIGHT?
DO YOU WANT TO CHECK, YOUNG MASTER?
BASH!
YAN, YOU CAN'T KILL HIM!
WE CAN'T SPILL ANY BLOOD HERE BEFORE THE WEDDING!
I'M NOT GOING TO KILL HIM
Hmm?
WHO IS THAT WOMAN?
I DON'T KNOW HER! SHE ISN'T MY ACCOMPLICE!

ARE THESE THE ONLY THINGS FOUND ON HIM?
YES. IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT HE TRIED TO ASSASSINATE THE KING WITHOUT EVEN BRINGING A SWORD
SHUT UP!
WHY SHOULD SCUM WHO KILLS FOR MONEY...
ALSO TRY TO PROTECT HIS OWN PEOPLE?
I'M SORRY, I REALLY DIDN'T WANT YOU TO GET INVOLVED IN THIS.
... I STILL WANT TO EXPLORE THE CITY MORE.
BUT THEN, I WAS THE ONE WHO SHOUTED YOUR NAME IN THE FIRST PLACE
DO WE NEED TO TELL HIS MAJESTY?
THERE'S NO NEED
SCUM.
WHO KILLS FOR MONEY...

YOU DON'T SEEM LIKE SOMEONE WHO'D STEAL GOLD OR JEWELRY
YOU SEEM LIKE SOMEONE WHO WOULD BE CONTENT WITH ANYTHING IN LIFE
IT'S BECAUSE YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE FACING DEATH, ISN'T IT?
I'M A CRIMINAL EVEN IF I ESCAPE I'LL ALWAYS BE CHASED AND HUNTED DOWN.
THERE'S NO ONE WAITING FOR ME, I DON'T HAVE ANYONE I WANT TO PROTECT AND I DON'T HAVE A CLAN...
I'M REALLY SICK AND TIRED OF MY LIFE I JUST KEEP WORKING FOR MONEY, AND MY LIFE SEEMS DEAD
YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT A HARPYNA IS? YOU REALLY MUST HAVE BEEN LOCKED UP FOR A LONG TIME
HARPYNA ARE THE SERVANTS OF THE GODDESS EUTHANASIE
THEY'RE BIRDS THAT COME FOR THE SOULS OF HUMANS
HARBRINGERS OF DEATH
FINALLY... I CAN DIE NOW
IF YOU'RE A HARPYNA, PLEASE TAKE MY SOUL AWAY
WHAT'S A HARPYNA?

MY AUNT IS REALLY A PAIN
EVEN THOUGH SHE'S THE CHIEF OF OUR NEIGHBORING CITY, SHE STILL WANTS TO INTERFERE IN MIMO'S AFFAIRS
DESPITE BEING REJECTED, SHE STILL MAKES TROUBLE FOR US AND NOW SHE'S EVEN GONE SO FAR AS TO SEND AN ASSASSIN!
PERHAPS SHE ISN'T HAPPY ABOUT OUR ALLIANCE WITH THE AGRA?
SO THAT'S WHY SHE DID IT.
IF THAT'S THE CASE, SHE STILL SHOULDN'T HAVE GONE AFTER MY LIFE
IF THIS IS WHAT SHE WANTS, THEN LET HER HAVE IT!
CLNK
YAN,
I WANT TO GIVE UP MY THRONE.

AT MALI'S WEDDING,
I'LL ABDICATE IN HIS FAVOR.
I'M SERIOUS
YOUR MAJESTY, YOU KEEP COMING BACK TO THIS NONSENSE
PRINCE MALI IS ONLY TWELVE YEARS OLD, AND THE OFFICIALS WON'T AGREE TO IT
I BECAME KING AT THE AGE OF THIRTEEN, WHEN MY FATHER PASSED AWAY.
ALSO, THERE ARE SOME OFFICIALS WHO WANT ME TO ABDICATE
DID YOU THINK THAT I DON'T KNOW THAT?

I WAS SO SCARED ...
I KNEW A FEAR THAT I'D NEVER FELT BEFORE.
THAT MORNING, WHEN I SAW THE ASSASSIN ...
QUICKLY, CALL THE PHYSICIAN!
REALLY, EVERYONE WANTS MALI TO HAVE THE THRONE, DON'T THEY ...
YOUR MAJESTY!
MAYBE I'LL DIE SOON ...
LATELY, A HARPYNA HAS BEEN PERCHING ON MY WINDOWSILL.
I KNOW THE OFFICIALS ARE WORRIED
THAT'S WHY I NEED TO APPOINT MALI AS MY SUCCESSOR, SO THEY'LL CALM DOWN.

"FORGIVE ME, THIS IS ALL FOR THE SAKE OF THE TRIBE."
"F...THER! WHY? WHY DO YOU WANT TO KILL ME...?"
THE HARPY MAY HAS ALREADY BEGUN SINGING...
I... AM DYING?
...

ARE YOU FROM THE NEIGHBORING CITY?
IF YOU LEAD ME THERE,
I'LL HELP YOU ESCAPE FROM HERE.
FIP

slam
AAgh
THUNK
CLATTER
WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?
ARE YOU PART RINEZHI?
RED HAIR
RAISA! QUICK, RUN!

ARE YOU A PALACE SLAVE?
LET'S GET GOING!
GO THIS WAY!
WE'RE SAVED! THANKS!
I'M ONLY RETURNING THE FAVOR.
A TUNNEL?

KALAS HAS BEEN HIDING HERE, WAITING FOR A CHANCE TO KILL THE KING.
I'VE ALREADY GIVEN UP, AND WAS ABOUT TO RETURN.
ISHI-MAYELU.
ASILAH?
WHAT'S THIS? I HEARD THAT YOUR ATTEMPT TO ASSASSINATE THE KING HAD FAILED AND YOU'D BEEN EXECUTED. WAS ALL THAT FAKED?
KALAS WANTS TO KILL THE KING? WHO HIRED HIM?
I DON'T KNOW. I HEARD IT WAS SOMEONE IN THE PALACE WHO ARRANGED IT.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
WELL! GOOD-BYE!
SOMEONE IS WILLING TO PAY A HANDSOME PRICE... NOWADAYS THE PALACE IS FILLED WITH OUR COLLEAGUES!
OH, THIS?
ASILAH, YOU'RE INJURED! WHAT HAP-PENED?
Though he's just watching silent-ly.
SO SOMEONE WAS ALREADY HERE BEFORE ME? LOOKS LIKE KING AKELIA IS REALLY POPU-LAR!

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I WAS NEARLY KILLED BY MY OWN FATHER.
I DON'T KNOW IF HE COULDN'T BRING HIMSELF TO DO IT BUT BEFORE FINISHING ME OFF, HE JUST HANDED ME OVER TO THE SLAVE TRADERS.
I WAS SOMEONE WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO DIE, BUT DIDN'T
I HAD A NEW CHANCE AT LIFE, SO THEY GAVE ME A WOMAN'S NAME I LEARNED NOW TO WORK AS A YUBI THERE
THAT'S HORRIBLE ABOUT YOUR FATHER
SO, BESIDES YOUR NAME NOW, YOU HAVE ANOTHER ONE?
FLAP FLAP
WAHH!
IT'S A HARPYNA

WHENEVER SOMEONE IS ILL OR INJURED, THE HARPYNA WILL FLY TO THEIR SIDE AND START SINGING.
IT'S RUMORED THAT WHOEVER HEARS ITS SINGING WILL DIE PEACEFULLY IN THEIR SLEEP.
A HARPYNA... OH, SO IT'S KIND OF LIKE A SPHINX!
SO THIS IS A HARPYNA!?
I THOUGHT THEY WERE ONLY MAKE-BELIEVE!
IT WON'T ATTACK YOU IF YOU DON'T TRY TO HURT IT. JUST TRY TO IGNORE IT.
SO IT SINGS?
THEY'RE PROTECTED IN MIMO, SO IT'S COMMON TO SEE HARPYNA HERE.
PEOPLE THINK THAT THEY REPRESENT BAD OMENS, AND THAT'S WHY THEY FEAR IT. BUT IT'S STILL A HOLY CREATURE.
?
I'VE ALSO HEARD THE HARPYNA SING BEFORE
I've heard them sing before, but it's not true
THAT'S JUST A SUPERSTITION
IS IT REALLY TRUE THAT PEOPLE DIE BY JUST HEARING THEM SING?
UP CLOSE, THEY'RE REALLY VERY CUTE!

OH YEAH, WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
THE PALACE HAS LOTS OF THEM. BUT PEOPLE HATE THEM, AND THAT'S WHY
I WON'T DARE TO SAY THAT I ACTUALLY LIKE THEIR VOICES A LOT
I ALSO... THINK THAT THEY ARE LOVELY
I'M SORRY, BUT IF I GO BACK, I'LL BE KILLED
THA... THAT ISN'T IMPORTANT. WILL YOU TAKE ME TO THE NEIGHBORING CITY?
... I CAN'T! IF I'M CAUGHT, THEY'LL SEND ME BACK! NO MATTER WHAT, I HAVE TO GET TO THE NEIGHBORING CITY!
YOU'RE FREE NOW, WHY DON'T YOU GO BACK YOURSELF?
PLEASE! MY MOTHER IS THERE!
WE HAVE TO GO NOW, THE SOLDIERS WILL BE HERE ANY MINUTE
SOLDIERS?

PEOPLE WITH MIXED BLOOD ARE THE LOWEST CLASS IN THIS CITY.
BUT THE WEIRD THING IS THAT HE ISN'T A SLAVE
WHAT'S GOING ON?
YOUR HANDS AREN'T ROUGH, AND THE JEWELRY YOU'RE WEARING LOOKS EXPENSIVE...
LET ME GO...!
AND YOU KNOW ALL THE EXITS IN THE PALACE. ARE YOU REALLY JUST A SLAVE?
HEY! WAIT!
HEY!

THAT WAS CLOSE! THAT BRAT IS SUSPICIOUS, HE JUST RAN OFF ALL OF A SUDDEN.
EH?
HAVE I SEEN YOU SOMEWHERE...
YAN!
...ALL THE EXITS IN THE PALACE ARE WATCHED, YOUR HIGHNESS
HEY THERE! HELP ME CATCH THAT LITTLE BRAT!
"BROTHER"... THIS KID IS PRINCE MAL!?
BROTHER!
I'M SORRY, BROTHER! I WAS SCARED TO DEATH...

WELL, IT'S HARD TO GET EXPERIENCE IN THIS SORT OF THING.
NOW WE'RE IN FOR IT. MAYBE IF YOU HADN'T BEEN CAUGHT, THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN A CHANCE FOR ME...
GREAT, THE KING'S BROTHER
WAIT! THERE'S SOMEONE IN THE PALACE AFTER YOUR LIFE!
ASILAH KNOWS WHO THAT PERSON IS!
BROTHER, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH THEM?
I WILL EXECUTE THEM AFTER YOUR WEDDING.
MALI, THAT GUY IS THE ASSASSIN WHO WAS AFTER ME IN THE FIRST PLACE!
I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT YOU'RE DEFENDING HIM, AND WERE WITH HIM
DO YOU KNOW WHAT ALL THIS MEANS?
I'M SORRY... NO MATTER WHAT, I REALLY WANT TO GO TO THE NEIGHBORING CITY.
SINCE I KNOW MOTHER IS THERE.

I DIDN'T WANT HER TO BE SUSPECT, SO I TOOK THE INITIATIVE AND GAVE THE RING TO PRINCE MALI...
I FOUND LADY KAYA'S RING IN THE MAN'S BELONGINGS.
YAN!
IT WAS ME I APOLOGIZE...
YOU KNOW WHERE LADY KAYA IS? WHEN DID YOU FIND THAT OUT?
BROTHER...
THE FATE OF MIMO AND THE AGRA LIES ON HIS SHOULDERS! DESPITE HOW CLOSE THE WEDDING IS, YOU STILL..!
DIDN'T YOU REALIZE THAT GIVING MALI THE RING WOULD MAKE HIM DO THAT!
LISTEN TO ME THIS IS THE BEST THING TO DO!
RIGHT NOW, RELYING ON THE RINEZH ALONE ISN'T ENOUGH TO RULE OVER THE WHOLE DESERT.
MALI ...!
I'M JUST TWELVE, I DON'T WANT TO MARRY ANYONE!
I DON'T WANT THAT KIND OF RESPONSIBILITY! I CAN'T DO IT!

LOOK AT HIM,
SO HEALTHY
MALI ...!
I DON'T WANT TO!
I CAN'T BE LIKE YOU!
YOU'RE THE CHILD OF THE RINEZHI AND THE DESERT PEOPLE, SO BOTH WILL BE WILLING TO FOLLOW YOU!
IN THE PAST, THE RINEZHI TRIBE WAS BOTH STRONG AND BEAUTIFUL...
THEY USED THEIR SMART MINDS AND HONED SKILLS TO RULE OVER THE WHOLE DESERT
BUT NOW, AFTER A FEW HUNDRED YEARS HAVE GONE BY, WHAT DIFFERENCE IS THERE BETWEEN THE RINEZHI AND THE DESERT PEOPLE?
RATHER, THE RINEZHI HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF THEMSELVES AS A SUPERIOR RACE AND HAVE BECOME EXTREMELY CONSERVATIVE AFTER GENERATIONS OF MARRYING AMONGST THEMSELVES. NOW THEY NO LONGER HAVE THE POWER TO RULE OVER THE ENTIRE DESERT

I'VE REACHED MY LIMITS.
AND NOW THE RINEZHI TRIBE IS BECOMING MORE FRUSTRATED TOWARDS THEIR KING, SINCE I CAN'T CONTROL THE SITUATION.
THE PEOPLE OF THE DESERT HAVE COME TOGETHER TO OPPOSE THE RULE OF THE RINEZHI TRIBE.
YOU WERE BORN HEALTHY, YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND MY WORRIES
YOU'RE STILL YOUNG
PLEASE BE STRONG
MY MOTHER DIED AT AN EARLY AGE AND LADY KAYA BECAME LIKE A MOTHER TO ME.
PLEASE FORGIVE ME BUT I WILL ONLY SERVE YOU, MY KING.
WHEN I'M DONE HANDING EVERYTHING OVER TO MALI, I JUST WANT TO SLEEP FOR A WHILE
BUT TO JOIN IT WITH THAT OF THE DESERT PEOPLE'S...
TO AVOID THE DOWNFALL OF OUR CITY, THE ONLY WAY IS NOT TO PRESERVE OUR BLOODLINE,
I ONLY KNEW THIS CITY, AND NEVER THOUGHT THAT IT WAS A PARADISE, BUT THEN...
TO PEOPLE WHO WERE BORN IN MIMO, THE CITY SEEMS LIKE THE PARADISE OF HEAVEN ITSELF.
LADY KAYA ONCE SAID THAT...

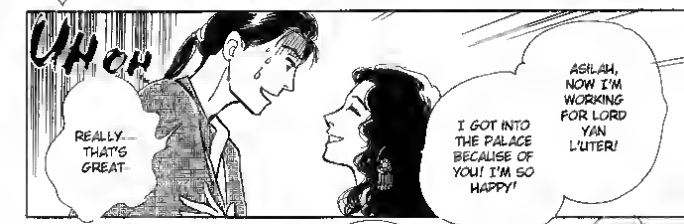
"YAN, I HOPE I'M PRO-CLAIMED KING SOON."
"FROM NOW ON, YOUR LIFE BELONGS TO HIM."
"YAN L'ITER, FROM NOW ON, PRINCE AKELIA WILL BE YOUR KING."
"I'LL TEAR DOWN THE WALLS SO EVERYONE CAN DRINK OUR WATER."
"ONCE I'M KING, I'LL BE ABLE TO DO ANY-THING."
"I WANT TO BE A GOOD KING..."
IT'S ALRIGHT
IT'S TOO DANGER-OUS TO ENTER.
GUARDS! BRING SOME FOOD OVER HERE!
RUMBLE...
THINK!
IS HE DEAD ALREADY?
TWITCH

ABOUT PRINCE MALI, IT WAS MY FAULT. BUT THANKFULLY HE'S FINE
BUT WHY DID YOU HAVE LADY KAYA'S RING?
I USED TO HAVE REBIYA'S FAVOR, BUT THEN SHE CAUGHT ME AND A MAID IN A ROOM TOGETHER, AND IN A RAGE, SENT ME STRAIGHT TO JAIL.
THE DAY BEFORE I WAS SUPPOSED TO LEAVE FOR MIMO, A MAID CAME TO THE PRISON AND HANDED ME A RING
"MIMO'S KING HAS A YOUNGER BROTHER BY A DIFFERENT MOTHER. I'M THAT BOY'S MOTHER. PLEASE GIVE THIS RING TO THE KING AND ASK HIM TO PROTECT YOU."
THAT LADY'S NAME IS KAYA?
SHE SAID THAT IF I KILLED MIMO'S KING, SHE WOULD SPARE MY LIFE.
"AND PLEASE TELL HIM THAT I'M FINE."
I DIDN'T KNOW MIMO'S KING HAD A BROTHER OF MIXED BLOOD, SO I DIDN'T BELIEVE HER
THAT MAID WAS FROM ONE OF THE DESERT TRIBES
LADY KAYA WAS THE LATE KING'S CONCUBINE.
AFTER THE KING PASSED AWAY, SHE WAS AFRAID SOMEONE WOULD KILL HER, SO SHE DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE. I NEVER THOUGHT SHE'D BE HIDING IN THE NEIGHBORING CITY.
YOU REALLY RECOGNIZE HER RING?
HER NAME AND SEAL ARE CARVED ON IT.
YOU'RE AN ARISTOCRAT WHO CAN READ?
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU CAN'T HIRE A YUBI, RIGHT?

I DON'T TRUST THE OTHERS...
FOR HIS MAJESTY, I'M WILLING TO DO ANYTHING
YOU'RE REALLY WEIRD FOR A RINEZHI
WHAT ARE YOU UP TO, GIVING FOOD TO A CRIMINAL LIKE ME?
YOU'RE AN ASSASSIN, RIGHT?
WANT ME TO HIRE YOU?
QUICK, HURRY BACK AND REPORT THIS TO REBIYA.
ASILAH HAS BEEN CAUGHT AND KILLED.
I HEARD THAT THE ASSASSIN WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH THIS MORNING.
SINCE MIMO'S GUARDIAN ANGEL IS THE GODDESS OF DEATH THE DEATH WILL BE WELCOMED...
Oh
I'M SORRY FOR THE CRIMINAL WHO WE USED AS A SCAPEGOAT,
BUT HE WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH ALREADY...
I HEARD THE ASSASSIN WAS A YUBI FROM THE NEIGHBORING CITY...
BUT BECAUSE OF THE WEDDING, THEY COULDN'T SPILL BLOOD, SO HE WAS HANGED

YAN, ARE YOU INSANE!?
HOW COULD YOU MAKE THE ASSASSIN THE KING'S GUARD...!
I'M USING POISON TO FIGHT POISON
BESIDES, HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS WHAT THE ASSASSIN LOOKS LIKE!
BUT...
RIGHT NOW, EVERYONE IN THE PALACE IS BUSY PREPARING FOR THE WEDDING
ADD UP THE GUESTS, GUARDS AND SERVANTS, AND IT AMOUNTS TO A LOT OF PEOPLE.
IF WE WERE TO LOOK FOR THE ASSASSIN AMONG THEM, IT WOULD BE LIKE FINDING A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK.
NO... NO ONE'S MORE LOYAL THAN YOU ARE.
WITH ME AROUND, DO YOU THINK HE'D HAVE ANOTHER CHANCE TO ASSASSINATE THE KING?
ONCE HE TRIED TO KILL YOU, YOUR MAJESTY, HOW COULD I EVER LET HIM GET OFF?
ONCE EVERYTHING IS SETTLED, I'LL GET RID OF HIM
PLEASE DON'T WORRY, YOUR MAJESTY!
YAN...

YOU SEE!
ASILAH!
...RAISA!?
Umph!
WHEN EVERYTHING'S DONE, I'LL PAY YOU AS PROMISED
YOU WANT ME TO BETRAY MY FRIEND JUST FOR MONEY? TELLS YOU NOT TO TRUST THE RINEZHI TRIBE!
SWISH
YAN!
IF YOU DON'T AGREE, THEN DIE RIGHT NOW!


UH OH
REALLY... THAT'S GREAT...
I GOT INTO THE PALACE BECAUSE OF YOU! I'M SO HAPPY!
ASILAH, NOW I'M WORKING FOR LORD YAN L'UTER!

BUT ISN'T THIS GREAT? AT LEAST THERE'S SOME WORK FOR YOU TO DO, SO YOUR LIFE HAS A PURPOSE, RIGHT?
LADY, I'M BEGGING YOU! RUN AWAY! IF YOU JUST WANT TO ADMIRE THE SCENERY, GO SOMEWHERE ELSE!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
She sure makes a good hostage
THE RINEZHI TRIBE SURE KNOWS HOW TO KEEP PEOPLE HOSTAGE!

MAYBE... OR MAYBE I'VE ALREADY FOUND THAT PERSON.
YOU'LL FIND THE PERSON YOU'RE LOOKING FOR HERE?
MANY OF THEM.
THERE'S SOMEONE IN THE PALACE WHO WANTS THE KING ASSASSINATED?
RIGHT NOW, THE PALACE IS DIVIDED INTO TWO FACTIONS. THE RINEZHI AND THE DESERT TRIBES.
IN THE PAST, THE COURT OFFICIALS AND COUNCILORS WERE FROM THE RINEZHI TRIBE, BUT NOW AROUND HALF ARE FROM THE DESERT
THOSE HAVE STARTED TO SOW DISCORD, WANTING THE KING TO STEP DOWN.
ON THE OTHER HAND, THE RINEZHI FACTION WANTS TO RESTORE THE TOTALITARIAN GOVERNMENT.
THEY DON'T LIKE THE KING SINCE HE WANTS ALL PEOPLE TO LIVE TOGETHER HARMONIOUSLY. THEY'VE TRIED EVERYTHING TO GET HIS COUSIN, LAKUSA, APPOINTED AS KING.
YOU MEAN IT'S POSSIBLE THAT BOTH FACTIONS WANT TO ASSASSINATE THE KING?
REBIYA HAS A SIMPLER MOTIVE. SHE'S JUST UPSET THAT HER NEPHEW DOESN'T LISTEN TO HER ORDERS

BUT THEN, HIS MAJESTY ISN'T A BAD KING
IT'S JUST THAT MIMO'S RINEZHI COMMUNITY IS VERY SECLUDED
IT'S LIKE WHAT HIS MAJESTY SAID, THAT THE RINEZHI CANNOT CONTROL THE ENTIRE DESERT NOW BY THEMSELVES
NOW IS THE TIME FOR CHANGE
THIS MATTER HASN'T BEEN MADE KNOWN TO THE PUBLIC
HIS MAJESTY DECIDED THAT DURING PRINCE MALI'S WEDDING HE WOULD ANNOUNCE TO THE PUBLIC HIS INTENTION TO GIVE UP THE THRONE TO PRINCE MALI
!
I NEVER THOUGHT HE'D TELL ME SO MANY SECRETS
ASI-LAH?
BUT I FEAR
THEN, WHOEVER WANTS TO ASSASSINATE HIS MAJESTY WOULDN'T HAVE ANY REASON TO DO SO

RUSTLE
I USED TO HAVE NO REGRETS ABOUT DYING, BUT EVER SINCE I WAS SAVED, I STARTED TO CHERISH MY LIFE...
IT LOOKS LIKE HE HAS NO INTENTION OF LETTING ME WALK OUT OF HERE ALIVE.
JOLT
A SPEAR...
THE GRA TRIBE?

WHO'S THERE!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?
RUSH!!
SSWH
HE'S KING AKELIA'S GUEST
HAS HE DONE SOMETHING TO OFFEND YOU?
HE'S TRESPASSED! IT'S FORBIDDEN FOR MEN TO ENTER THE HAREM!
WHO ARE YOU!? HOW DARE YOU!!

I DIDN'T HAVE A GUIDE, AND I GOT LOST.
PLEASE FORGIVE ME.
BE MORE CAREFUL IN THE FUTURE!
LET'S GO!
AND WHO IS THAT BOY?
THE BRIDE'S SERVANT.
ASILAH, ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
THOSE TWO ACCOMPANIED THE AGRA TRIBE'S BRIDE WHEN SHE ENTERED THE HAREM. LOTS OF SERVANTS CAME.
THAT PERSON...
JUST NOW WAS A GIRL.
YAN L'UTER...
LET ME ASK YOU,
IF KING AKELIA PASSED AWAY, WHO WILL BE THE NEXT IN LINE TO THE THRONE?
BASED ON THEIR AGES, THE PERSON NEXT IN LINE WOULD BE HIS MAJESTY'S COUSIN, PRINCE LAKUSA.

WHY DO YOU ASK?
ALRIGHT THEN, LET ME HELP YOU, I'M FEELING SOME HEAT INSIDE ME!
BUT IF THE KING'S WORD CAN'T BE PROVEN TO THE COUNCIL AFTER HIS DEATH, THE NEXT IN LINE WOULD BE PRINCE LAKUSA—
BUT THE KING HIMSELF HAS THE AUTHORITY TO NAME HIS SUCCESSOR.
VERY INTEREST-ING
SO IT MEANS THAT, IF KING AKELIA'S ALIVE THERE'S STILL A CHANCE FOR PRINCE MALI TO BE HIS SUCCESSOR
THAT'S RIGHT!
FEELING SOME HEAT AFTER YOU GOT PUNCHED BY THE AGRA'S SERVANT?
I'M SORRY
DIDN'T I TELL YOU NOT TO WANDER OFF BY YOURSELF?
IF PRINCE MALI BE-COMES HIS SUCCES-SOR, IT MEANS THAT THE AGRA GIRL WILL BECOME MIMO'S CROWN PRINCESS
IBELU, WE JUST FOUND THIS
HMMM
HEY "BRIDE" YOU REALLY HAVE NO MANNERS AT ALL!
WHO KNOWS HOW USEFUL IT COULD BE! LET'S GO IN AND CHECK IT OUT!
IT LOOKS REALLY DIRTY, LIKE NO ONE'S USED IT FOR A LONG TIME
IT'S A SECRET PAS-SAGE
QUICK, HURRY!
AH! IBELU TAKE A LOOK AT THIS!

ALTHOUGH IT'S A MARRIAGE THE GROOM IS ONLY TWELVE. SO FOR A FEW YEARS, YOU TWO WILL BE HUSBAND AND WIFE IN NAME ONLY.
MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE THE WEDDING IS A MISTAKE, RIGHT?
THIS COULD ENDANGER YOUR LIFE AND SAFETY, MISTRESS.
THAT'S RIGHT! SO FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS, I'LL BE BY YOUR SIDE, TAKING CARE OF YOU.
THIS IS LIKE AN ENEMY'S CAMP.
THE AGRA TRIBE WILL BE JOINED WITH THE RINEZHI, A TRIBE THAT'S BEEN OUR ENEMY FOR YEARS.
EH?
JUST NOW— THAT MAN...
HE JUST SAW ME AND LOOKED VERY SURPRISED. HE DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO HIDE IT...
NOTHING...
THE GUARD WHO PROTECTED THE KING FROM YOU, WHO YOU INJURED, WILL BE STAYING WITH YOU, ASILAH. YOUR ROOM IS JUST NEXT DOOR.
...I'M GLAD YOU WEREN'T SERIOUSLY INJURED.

The Paradise on the Sand

Suna no Ue no Rakuen c01b

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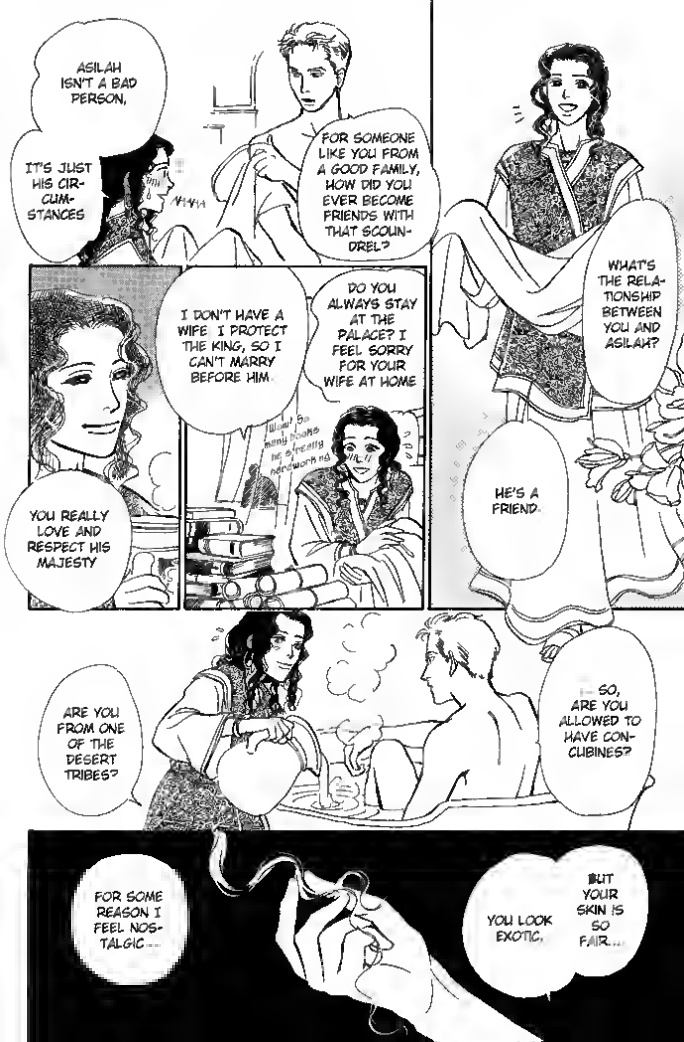

ASILAH ISN'T A BAD PERSON,
IT'S JUST HIS CIR-CUM-STANCES
FOR SOMEONE LIKE YOU FROM A GOOD FAMILY, HOW DID YOU EVER BECOME FRIENDS WITH THAT SCOUN-DREL?
WHAT'S THE RELA-TIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND ASILAH?
HE'S A FRIEND.
I DON'T HAVE A WIFE. I PROTECT THE KING, SO I CAN'T MARRY BEFORE HIM.
DO YOU ALWAYS STAY AT THE PALACE? I FEEL SORRY FOR YOUR WIFE AT HOME
YOU REALLY LOVE AND RESPECT HIS MAJESTY
ARE YOU FROM ONE OF THE DESERT TRIBES?
...SO, ARE YOU ALLOWED TO HAVE CON-CUBINES?
FOR SOME REASON I FEEL NOS-TALGIC...
YOU LOOK EXOTIC,
BUT YOUR SKIN IS SO FAIR...

I CONSIDER ALL THE CHILDREN FROM MY COUNTRY TO BE MY CHILDREN
YOU HAVE A HUSBAND?
. I'VE COME FROM A COUNTRY FAR AWAY TO FIND MY CHILDREN
I'M SEARCHING FOR ALL OF THOSE LOST CHILDREN.
THEY ALL WENT SEARCHING FOR PARADISE, AND SINCE THEN, WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM THEM.
MOTHER
I WILL ASK YOU TO COME BACK TO MIMO
IF I BECOME THE KING...
PRINCE
PRINCE MALI
SNAP
LOOK OUT! DUCK!
BUT THAT CAN'T HAPPEN HOW CAN I EVER BE THE KING
PLEASE COME BACK! IT'S TIME TO TRY ON THE WEDDING CLOTHES...

BASH
rustle rustle
Ouch...
Ow!
ARE YOU ALRIGHT? ARE YOU HURT?
SORRY, BUT IT'S YOUR FAULT TOO, SINCE YOU DIDN'T TRY TO GET OUT OF THE WAY.
POT
YEAH...
ARE YOU FROM THE AGRA TRIBE?
THAT'S RIGHT!
A KID LIKE YOU KNOWS HOW TO USE A SPEAR?
IN THE AGRA TRIBE, EVERYONE'S TRAINED HOW TO USE A SPEAR SINCE THEY'RE YOUNG.
THK

BY THE WAY, I'M MALI!
I HAVE TO GO NOW.
WILL YOU COME HERE AGAIN? IF YOU DO, I'LL SHOW YOU THE WATERFALLS.
!
DO YOU WANT TO GO TO THE DESERT?
YOU'RE A CRYBABY BECAUSE YOU'VE LIVED IN THIS KIND OF PARADISE FOR TOO LONG.
EVERYONE WILL BECOME STRONG BY GOING INTO THE DESERT.
IF YOU'RE WEAK, YOU'RE DEAD MEAT.
IS IT TRUE THAT WHOEVER GOES THERE GETS STRONGER?
THAT STRETCH OF DESERT WILL MAKE A PERSON STRONGER.
JUST LIKE ASILAH, WHO TRAVELED ACROSS THE DESERT.
WILL I EVER BECOME STRONGER?

I wish I could explore stone...
I STILL PREFER THE DAYS WHEN WE PROTECTED HIS MAJESTY.
BROTHER!
IF YOU DARE PLAY ANY TRICKS WITH ME I'LL MAKE SURE YOU REPORT DIRECTLY TO THE GODDESS!
YOU'D BETTER FIND THAT ASSASSIN QUICKLY.
THIS SURE IS WHERE THE GODDESS REIGNS, THEY REALLY HAVE A LOT OF HARPYNA HERE.
WHEN HE RECOVERS I'LL GO TO THE DESERT TO TAKE A LOOK
BROTHER AND I DON'T KNOW THE DESERT
PLEASE TALK TO HIM TOMORROW
YOUR HIGHNESS, HIS MAJESTY HAS A FEVER, AND HE'S RESTING NOW
THEN JUST LET ME VISIT

THEN I'LL RETURN WHEN I'VE GROWN STRONG
TNK-TNK
THE KING HAS A FEVER,
SING FOR HIM!
Sh!
HUSH
Chiir—P
Chiiirrrp
Chii
Chiirr...
Chiirrr
Zzz

SOME-ONE HELP!
THERE ARE HARPYNA IN HIS MAJESTY'S CHAMBER ...!
HAVE THEY COME TO TAKE HIS LIFE!?
AAAH
AH
Chirrr
Chirrr
AH!
WHAT'S THIS ABOUT? DIRTY HARPYNA!
GET OUT OF THERE! THIS IS REALLY BAD LUCK!
PRINCE MAL!! WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US?
PRINCE AKELIA'S LIFE IS AT STAKE HERE!
NO, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT...
HARPYNA... AREN'T WHAT YOU THINK THEY ARE!
IF THEY SING, MY BROTHER CAN BREATHE EASIER AND SLEEP MORE PEACEFULLY

I'D ALREADY NOTICED THAT THE NUMBER OF HARPYNA IN THE PALACE HAS INCREASED...
NOW THAT I THINK OF IT, SINCE THEN, HIS MAJESTY HAS ALSO GOTTEN SICK MORE OFTEN.
AN ATMOSPHERE OF DEATH HAS ALREADY SURROUNDED THE PALACE
IT COULD BE A BAD OMEN
THE HARPYNA SINGING!
IT'S TRUE! ALL THOSE RUMORS ABOUT THE HARPYNA'S SINGING BRINGING DEATH ARE LIES!
THEY STARTED COMING HERE A LONG TIME AGO.
OH... THIS IS TOO SCARY!
SINCE THE DAY THE WEDDING WAS DECIDED. WASN'T IT RUMORED THAT IT WAS A BAD OMEN?
RUBBISH!
THAT'S WHY SHE SENT THE HARPYNA HERE...
SHE PROBABLY DISAPPROVES OF THE TWO TRIBES' MARRIAGE...
... IT MUST BE THAT THE GODDESS IS OFFENDED.
SHH! DON'T TALK NONSENSE!
PRINCE MALI HAS ALWAYS CALLED THE HARPYNA INTO HIS MAJESTY'S CHAMBER ...

THE PROBLEM DOESN'T LIE WITH THEM...!
ALL OF THAT IS JUST SUPERSTITION! EVERYONE BELIEVES THAT THE HARPYNA ARE THE MESSENGERS OF THE GODDESS, SO THEY WERE TAKEN CARE OF AND FED. THAT'S WHY SO MANY GATHERED IN THE PALACE
PRINCE MALI WAS ALSO IN THE KING'S CHAMBER AND HEARD THEM SING, AND ISN'T HE JUST AS HEALTHY?
MAYBE A HUGE DISASTER WILL BEFALL US! WE SHOULD CANCEL THE WEDDING!
THE WEDDING IS WHAT'S CAUSING IT!
ARE THEY REALLY THAT SCARY!
DO YOU ALL WANT A WAR WITH THE AGRA TRIBE!?
YOU WANT TO EXPLAIN IT BY SAYING THAT THE HARPYNA ARE SCARY!?
YAN... WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
WAKE UP!
YOU'RE ALL BLINDED BY THESE STUPID SUPERSTITIONS!

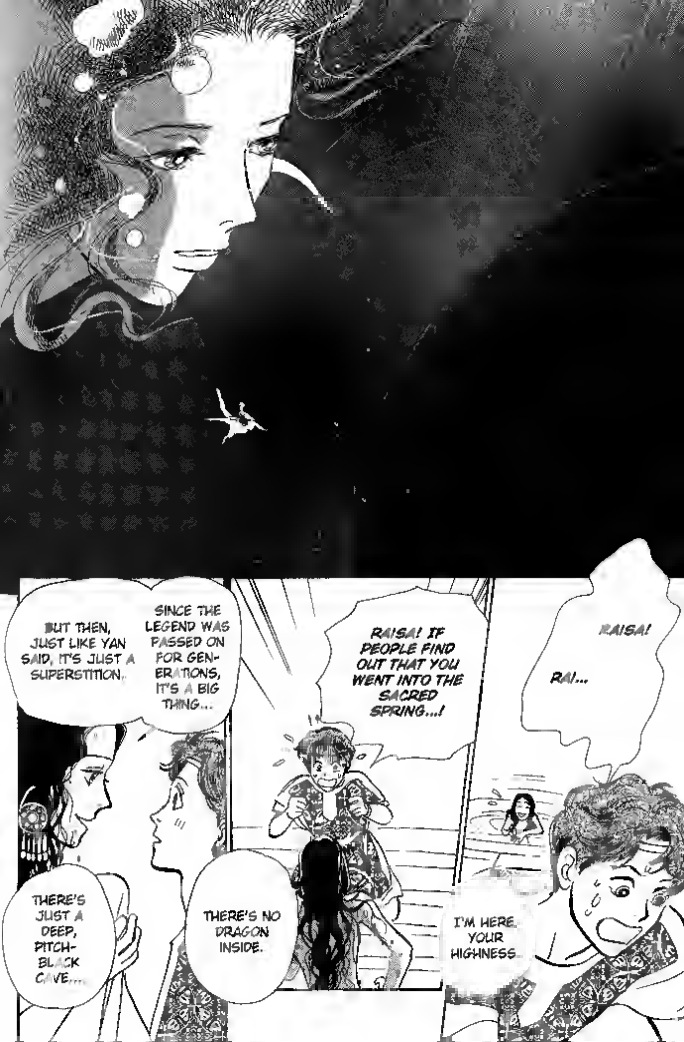
AAH
BAM
WSH
THIS IS INSANE...!
YOU'RE TOO MUCH! HOW CAN YOU HURT AN INNOCENT ANIMAL!
YOU SHOULD RESPECT THE GODDESS... YOU'LL SUFFER HER RETRIBUTION!
MAYBE THEY USED TO BE MESSENGERS OF THE GODDESS,
BUT NOW THEY'RE JUST NORMAL ANIMALS. WHAT IS THERE TO BE AFRAID OF?

JUST DO WHAT YOU WANT TO, YOUR MAJESTY!
EVEN IF YOU ABDICATE, I WILL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR YOU!
THIS IS A MESS.
YOU WANTED TO BE THE BAD GUY, RIGHT, YAN?
CAN YOU REPRESENT ME AND HELP MALI WHEN HE'S KING?
I'M SORRY FOR NOT BEING A GOOD KING.
WHO'S THERE?
THAT'S THE ONE ORDER I CAN'T FULFILL...

THERE'S PLENTY FOR YOU TO USE.
THIS IS THE SHRINE OF THE GODDESS EUTHANASIE.
CAN YOU JUST... GIVE ME SOME WATER? I WANT TO HEAL THIS HARPYNA.
YES, MY NAME IS RAISA. NOW I'M SERVING LORD L'UTER.
YOU WERE THE ONE WITH ASIUH BACK THEN...
I FINALLY CAME HERE
SO THIS IS THE GODDESS'S FOUNTAIN
YUP... A DRAGON LIVES IN IT!
A DRAGON?
THIS SPRING IS REALLY HUGE — IT LOOKS REALLY DEEP.
HARPYNA ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE GODDESS, SO JUST HELP YOURSELF!

LONG AGO, THE RINEZHIS, LIKE THE GODS, USE TO LIVE IN THE HEAVENS
THE GODDESS EUTHANASIE CHANGED INTO A DRAGON
BUT THEN, TO DIFFERENTIATE THE GODS AND THE RINEZHIS, THE GODS GAVE THE RINEZHIS SENDING DEATH
DEATH TO PEOPLE WAS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GODDESS EUTHANASIE
WHEN THE GODS FOUND OUT ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIP, THEY GREW ANGRY
SO THEY BANISHED EUTHANASIE AND THE YOUNG MAN AND HIS TRIBE FROM HEAVEN
BACK THEN THERE WAS NO WATER HERE, SO THE YOUNG MAN DIED OF THIRST
EUTHANASIE, HEART-BROKEN, TURNED INTO A DRAGON AND WENT UNDERGROUND
A SPRING APPEARED IN THE CAVE SHE VANISHED INTO, AND IT NOURISHED THE EARTH
THE YOUNG MAN'S TRIBE BUILT A CITY RIGHT THERE, AND THAT'S HOW MIMO WAS FOUNDED
HOWEVER, SHE FELL IN LOVE WITH A YOUNG MAN AND SAVED HIS LIFE.
SOON AFTER, THEY HAD A CHILD, THE FIRST HARPYNA

THAT LEGEND IS ABOUT TRAGIC LOVE...
IT'S A LEGEND THAT FORBIDS INTERMARRIAGE BETWEEN TWO DIFFERENT TRIBES
IF YOU MARRY A DIFFERENT TRIBE TRAGEDY WILL ENSUE...
BUT THEN, THE HARPYNA ARE STILL OFF-LIMITS
THE GODS PROMISED THE RINEZHI TRIBE THAT IF WE MAINTAIN OUR PURE BLOOD, ONE DAY WE'LL BE FORGIVEN AND CAN RETURN TO HEAVEN
AND IF WE WERE TO BREAK THE COVENANT... THE DRAGON THAT SLEEPS HERE WILL AWAKEN AND CAUSE HARM...
ALTHOUGH IT'S JUST A SUPERSTITION...
I WONDER IF YAN WILL BE FINE? OR IF THE WRATH OF GOD...
RAIS...?


RAISA!
RAI...
RAISA! IF PEOPLE FIND OUT THAT YOU WENT INTO THE SACRED SPRING...!
I'M HERE, YOUR HIGHNESS.
THERE'S NO DRAGON INSIDE.
THERE'S JUST A DEEP, PITCH-BLACK CAVE....
BUT THEN, JUST LIKE YAN SAID, IT'S JUST A SUPERSTITION.
SINCE THE LEGEND WAS PASSED ON FOR GENERATIONS, IT'S A BIG THING...

IF YOU DON'T START TO REALLY LOVE AND CARE FOR THESE ANIMALS,
ONE DAY YOU MIGHT JUST RECEIVE GOD'S WRATH
THE HARPYNA CAN FLY ALREADY? IT SEEMS MY SKILLS ARE GETTING LOUSY!
FLAP FLAP
RAISA?
IT'S A GIFT FROM THE GODDESS'S FOUNTAIN.
RUSTLE
THESE PEOPLE DON'T LOOK LIKE MESSENGERS OF THE GODDESS
RATTLE
IS THIS EXTRA PUNISHMENT?
RAISA, JUST RUN!
CLANG

THE G... GOD-DESS!
Y..N...
WHERE IS HE?
IT'S THE GOD-DESS'S RETRI-BUTION!
AH!
AH!
float
AH!
SHE'S FLYING!

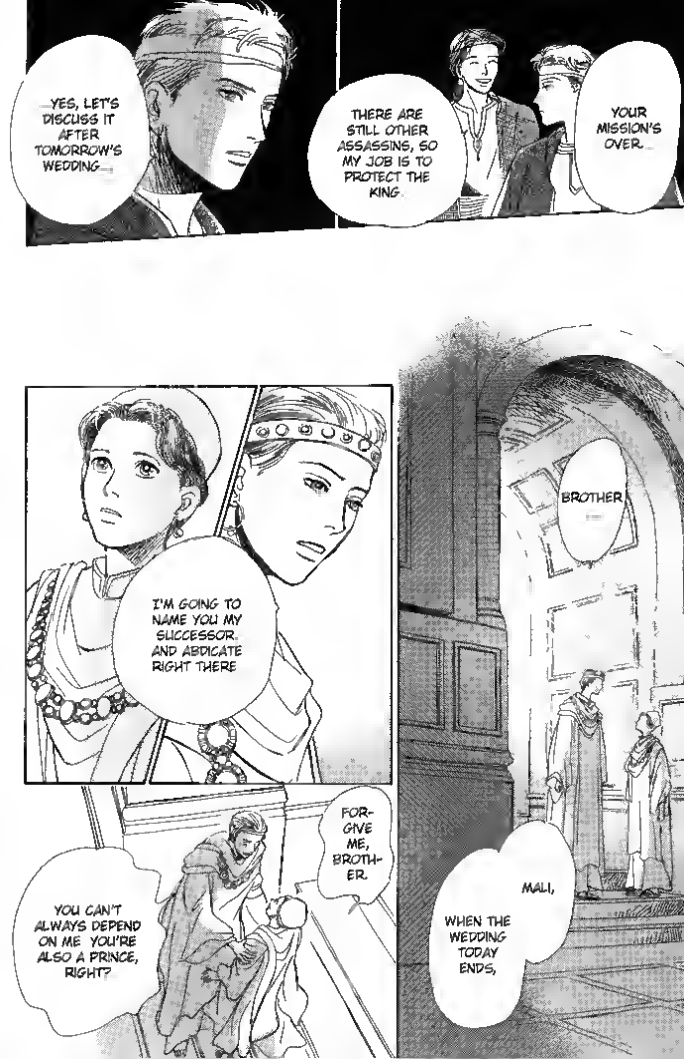
WHAT IS THIS!?
OH NO!
THE GODDESS HAS COME TO TAKE OUR SOULS!
AH!
AHHH!
IT CAN'T BE HELPED, STAY QUIET
RAISA, WHO ON EARTH ARE YOU!?
HOW ARE YOU DOING TH...
SNS
NO
YAN
YOU DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING
WHAT DID YOU JUST SEE?
DIDN'T SEE ANY-THING
YOU DIDN'T SEE ANY-THING GOT IT?
YOU WERE ATTACKED AND YOU FAINTED
NO, YOU DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING
RAISA FLYING IN THE SKY

I'M THE GODDESS IN HUMAN FORM.
I'VE COME TO HELP YOU
YES... EVEN IF YOU DO REMEMBER SOMETHING...
YOU'RE RIGHT, I'M THE GODDESS...
OH, SO THAT'S LEAKED OUT? THE RINEZHI REALLY CAN'T BE TRUSTED.
SO WHAT'S THE DEAL? WANT TO JOIN US? YOU'LL EARN TONS OF MONEY.
KALAS?
DO YOU HAVE A WAY OUT OF HERE?
THAT'S NO PROBLEM, I'VE GOT SOMEONE POWERFUL BACKING ME.
I HEARD THAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR ME. ARE YOU GOING TO BETRAY YOUR COLLEAGUES?
TAKE ME TO HIM. I WANT TO HAVE A PERSONAL TALK ABOUT MY REWARDS
SO HE EMPLOYED YOU?

!?
THERE ARE OTHER SKILLED ASSASSINS IN THE PALACE RIGHT NOW. ONLY THE ONE WHO DOES THE DEED GETS THE REWARD MONEY.
WELL, I'VE NO CHOICE BUT TO LET YOU MEET HIM.
THERE ARE OTHERS? SO, WHO'S THE ONE SUPPORTING YOU?
KALAS!
I'VE BEEN ORDERED TO FIND AND KILL YOU!
IT'D BE DISASTROUS IF YOU WERE TO SPOIL THEIR PLANS
BEFORE TOMORROW'S WEDDING—
...KALAS!
THINK
AND WE HAVE TO DO IT BEFORE HE NAMES HIS SUCCESSOR—
WE HAVE TO KILL THE KING TO GET THE MONEY

THIS IS THE ASSASSIN WE'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR?
OH, GREAT!
HE WAS JUST ABOUT TO TELL ME WHO THE MASTERMIND IS!
IF WE DON'T FIND OUT WHO'S BEHIND THIS, WE CAN'T SOLVE THE PROBLEM!
AND THERE ARE OTHER ASSASSINS...!
WHERE ARE WE?
WE WERE ATTACKED BY THIEVES, BUT WE MANAGED TO ESCAPE HERE.
MY HEAD HURTS...
YOU WERE HIT ON THE HEAD. YOU SHOULDN'T MOVE SO MUCH. THERE MIGHT BE MORE THIEVES AROUND.
IS THIS THE EASTERN LAKE? TRY MOVING THE STONE BENEATH THE STATUE BEHIND YOU.
... IF YOU KEEP WALKING, YOU'LL REACH THE SHRINE.
A SECRET PASSAGE...!
THIS IS AN ANCIENT CITY, SO THERE ARE LOTS OF PASSAGES THAT HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN
I EXPLORED THEM WHEN I WAS YOUNG.
YOU WENT THROUGH ALL OF THEM? YOU MUST HAVE BEEN REALLY DETERMINED.
AND YOU DID ALL OF THAT FOR THE KING?

I'VE ALWAYS JUST BEEN LIVING FOR HIM.
THOUGH YOU'RE QUITE OVERBEARING, I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE AS SELFLESS...
THE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO KILL THE KING MUST THINK YOU'RE A PAIN IN THE NECK!
I'M SPEECHLESS AT YOUR LOYALTY. I DIDN'T THINK PEOPLE LIKE YOU REALLY EXISTED ANYMORE...
RIGHT NOW, THE GODDESS'S DIVINE PUNISHMENT SHOULD HAVE TAKEN CARE OF THE THIEVES...
I'M STARTING TO WANT TO HELP YOU...
OH YES...
BASED ON WHAT THE ASSASSIN SAID, IT'S LIKELY THAT THE ONE BEHIND THE PLOT IS THE SAME ONE WHO'S AFTER THE THRONE
IS HE REALLY THE ONE AFTER THE KING'S LIFE?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT FOR THE KING'S SAFETY, IT'D BE BETTER NOT TO HAVE HIM THERE TOMORROW
WE'VE ALREADY PUT PRINCE LAKUSA BEHIND BARS.


YES, LET'S DISCUSS IT AFTER TOMORROW'S WEDDING.
THERE ARE STILL OTHER ASSASSINS, SO MY JOB IS TO PROTECT THE KING.
YOUR MISSION'S OVER.
I'M GOING TO NAME YOU MY SUCCESSOR. AND ABDICATE RIGHT THERE
BROTHER.
FOR-GIVE ME, BROTH-ER.
YOU CAN'T ALWAYS DEPEND ON ME. YOU'RE ALSO A PRINCE, RIGHT?
MALI,
WHEN THE WEDDING TODAY ENDS,

ALTHOUGH THE RINEZHI TRIBE HAS BEEN THE OVERLORD OF THE DESERT PEOPLE WE'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO RULE OURSELVES SUCCESSFULLY
YOU WILL BE THE FIRST KING TO ACCOMPLISH THAT!
BROTHER!
I WON'T LIVE MUCH LONGER!
SOMEONE HEALTHY AND FULL OF ENERGY LIKE YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND
THE FEELINGS OF A KING THAT DOESN'T HAVE THE LOVE AND RESPECT OF HIS PEOPLE.
KNOCK!
WE'VE COME TO FETCH THE BRIDE.
OKAY, COMING.
SKRIIII
AHH!
I WOULD REALLY LOVE TO SEE OUR MISTRESS WEARING THIS OUTFIT.
WELL, LET ME BORROW IT LATER

DON'T USE YOUR SWORDS! THAT WILL RUIN THE CLOTHES!
...!
WHERE'S THE BRIDE'S CHAMBERS?
THE BRIDE LOOKS READY.
WHY DOES THE ENTOURAGE LOOK DIFFERENT?
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU HAVEN'T SLEPT AT ALL.
OF COURSE. I CAN'T REST KNOWING THE KING'S IN DANGER.
SHIT! THOSE PEOPLE WERE IMPOSTERS!
HEY! WHERE'S THE BRIDE?
THE BRIDE AND HER SERVANTS WERE ATTACKED!
THIS IS...!
creak

AKLEEMA!
ARE YOU THERE!?
A SECRET PASSAGE
!
AKLEEMA!
ARE YOU ALRIGHT!?
DON'T BE AFRAID, I'M AN AGRA
DON'T COME NEAR ME! I'M NOT AKLEEMA!
YOUR FATHER IS RASHID AND YOUR MOTHER IS HU-
YOU HAD AN ACCIDENT WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG AND HAVE A ON YOUR LEFT KNEE FROM IT.
WHO'S THERE?
I'M NOT AKLEEMA.

YOU LOOK A LOT LIKE MY SISTER HIYAM WHEN SHE WAS YOUR AGE.
YOU'RE SCARED, RIGHT?
YOUR NANNY WAS STRANGLED, BUT SHE'S STILL ALIVE.
WHO ARE YOU...?
IT'S ALRIGHT NOW.
COME OVER HERE.
PLEASE TAKE CARE OF HER, SHE'S THE REAL BRIDE
THE KING IS IN DANGER!
USE THE SECRET PASSAGE, IT'S MUCH FASTER! HURRY!
GO STRAIGHT AHEAD AND TURN RIGHT!
YOU ESCAPED FINE
I'LL GO WITH YOU...
ISN'T THAT HABILUSA?
THE SHRINE AND THE WEDDING ARE IN THIS DIRECTION!
EH? BUT YAN SAID TO GO RIGHT...
POOR KID, IT'S ALRIGHT NOW

AH!
YAN!
THE WEDDING'S ALREADY STARTED!
RUN FASTER!
HURRY UP!
GOT IT
YOU KNOW EVERYTHING, THAT THE KING IS GOING TO ABDICATE AND ABOUT ASILAH TOO
HABILUSA, WHY DID YOU DO IT?

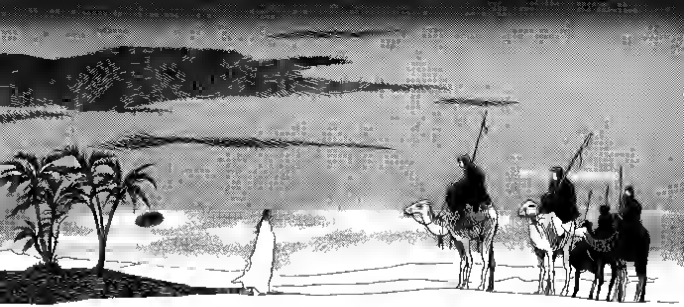
FOR THE DAY WE'RE FORGIVEN AND RETURN TO HEAVEN.
FOR THAT STUPID, SILLY SUPERSTITION?
HOW COULD ANYONE POSSIBLY COME AND GET US!
PLEASE
THE GUARDS WILL COME SOON
THE KING ISN'T THE MOST IMPORTANT.
WE HAVE TO PROTECT THE RINEZHI'S PURE BLOOD. NEVER MIX IT WITH THE DESERT PEOPLE.
YOU PEOPLE JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND
THAT WE HAVE TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR DESCENDANTS
LORD YAN L'LITER!
THE ASSASSINS INJURED LORD HABILUSA AND ESCAPED THAT WAY
HURRY TO THE SHRINE NOW!
WE WERE EXPELLED FROM HEAVEN LONG AGO.

BAM!
THAT BRIDE IS AN IM-POSTER!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING...
MOVE! LET ME PASS! THAT'S AN ASSAS-SIN!
WE FORGOT ABOUT HEAVEN VERY EARLY ON.
SO THERE WILL BE NO ONE TO TAKE US BACK
I CAN'T MAKE IT IN TIME
GIVE ME THAT!

GASP
TH
NK

AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
BRO...
BROTHER?

BRO-
THER!
BRO-
THER
—!
THE
KING'S
BEEN
KILLED!
AHHH
HE'S
BEEN
KILLED!
THE
AGRA
BRIDE
KILLED
HIM!
AH



STU... STUPID!
I DON'T HAVE A SON LIKE YOU!

I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU FOR AGES. HOW ARE YOU?
FATHER.

SIGH ... SO PRINCE IDRISS IS STILL ALIVE
YUP, GUESS MY EYES AND EARS AREN'T SO GREAT ANY-MORE
YOU DIDN'T HEAR ANY-THING, GOT IT?

I'VE SOMETHING TO ASK AGRA'S LEADER.
PLEASE PROTECT MIMO
LET THAT LITTLE GIRL LIVE ON HAPPILY...

I DON'T NEED YOU TO REMIND ME
I USED TO BE YOUNG AND HEADSTRONG. I ALWAYS WANTED TO SHOW OFF, AND HAD A HUGE EGO.
THE AGRA TRIBE HAD NEVER SUBMITTED TO ANY COUNTRY OR COOPERATED WITH THEM.
ONCE, AFTER LOSING A BATTLE, THE ENEMY DEMANDED MY ONLY SON.
I COULD NEVER BEAR THE HUMILIATION OF HAVING MY FAMILY MEMBER TAKEN HOSTAGE. I THOUGHT THAT I'D RATHER KILL HIM MYSELF THEN HAND HIM OVER. SO I TOOK HIM TO THE DESERT.
BUT I COULDN'T DO IT, SO I GAVE THE ENEMY THE BLOOD-STAINED CLOTHES AND SWORD INSTEAD.
BECAUSE OF MY PRIDE, MY SON COULD NEVER RETURN TO THE AGRA TRIBE AGAIN.
I DON'T WANT TO MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE AGAIN.
I DON'T CARE IF IT'S A POLITICAL MARRIAGE OR AS A HOSTAGE.
AS LONG AS I CAN PROTECT MY CHILD, I'M WILLING TO ALLY MYSELF WITH THE RINEZHI TRIBE.
EVEN WHEN I CAN'T PROTECT YOU, I STILL HAVE TO TRY.

THE KING'S BLOOD HAS STAINED THE SHRINE...
THE ROYAL FAMILY HAS BEEN CURSED BY THIS DEATH...
THE NEXT KING...
BUT ISN'T THAT THE REASON HE MET WITH DIVINE RETRIBUTION?
THIS WEDDING IS A BAD OMEN INDEED
IF PRINCE MALI TAKES THE THRONE MIMO WILL BE DESTROYED!
LET'S JUST FORGET ABOUT THE MONARCHY AND LET THE COUNCIL DECIDE...
SHUT UP!
AREN'T I ENOUGH OF A WITNESS THAT THE KING PASSED HIS THRONE TO PRINCE MALI!?
THE GODDESS MUST BE ANGRY.
MIMO IS GOING TO BE DESTROYED
SHOULD BE PRINCE LAKUSA...
BUT THE KING PASSED HIS THRONE TO PRINCE MALI...
PRINCE MALI
THIS IS TOO ABSURD...
THE MASTERMIND BEHIND THE ASSASSINATION HASN'T BEEN DISCOVERED YET, SO HOW CAN WE LET THE COUNCIL DECIDE ANYTHING?
LET'S GO TO THE SHRINE OF THE GODDESS AND LISTEN FOR DIVINE GUIDANCE!

HE... HE REALLY DIDN'T LIKE ME...
RIGHT?
YOUR BROTHER HE NEVER TRIED RUNNING AS FAST AS HE COULD
ACTUALLY, HE WANTED TO BE LIKE YOU
PRINCE MALI HAVEN'T YOU EVER BEEN ENVIOUS OF SOMETHING YOU DON'T HAVE, THAT OTHERS DO...?
PLEASE GET A HOLD OF YOURSELF YOU HAVE TO PICK UP YOUR BROTHER'S PLANS...
HE JUST PASSED AWAY, HOW CAN I...
IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A JOYOUS WEDDING...
POOR PRINCE.
TODAY EVERYONE WILL STAND GUARD WITHOUT REST...
I HAVE ALWAYS...
WANTED TO BE LIKE MY BROTHER...

MY KING...
ONLY YOU.
ONLY YOU ARE MY KING.

YAN ...
HELP MALI FOR ME...
I WANT TO BE A GOOD KING...

GODDESS EUTHANASIE,
PLEASE FORGIVE US
PLEASE FORGIVE US, AND PLEASE SAVE US...
PLEASE SHOW US THE RIGHT PATH.
WE ARE GOING TO CONSECRATE THIS YOUNG KING TO YOU.
flicker
OUR NEW KING MALI
EH?
WHAT'S THAT...
AH...
AHH...!

You have been spared from your punishment!
Oh Lutha nasie arise!
People of Mimo!
I have heard your voices
And I forgive you all.

I'm not here to bring you back.
Heaven isn't as beautiful as Mimo.
Ah... I'm so glad.
This means I can return to Heaven?
!
RAISA!
Heaven has recognized this red-haired youth as King.
And the Goddess Euthanasia will be the protector of the living.
From now on, she will forever be the guardian of Mimo.
You have all passed the trials of Heaven.
And built a paradise on the sand.
You have to build a true paradise where people of Heaven and people of Earth can live together peacefully.
It's much more beautiful than Heaven.

CLNK
YOU KNOW TOO MUCH
IF YOU CAN AVOID IT, TRY NOT TO COME HERE AGAIN
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "TRY NOT TO"? HOW TACTFUL. YOU JUST WANT ME TO SHUT UP, RIGHT?
Live happily ever after in this paradise on the sand...
I hope that you will always...
Forever ...
And the Sacyna will bring you peace and harmony -

Right now I don't
I DON'T HATE ANYONE
THIS WAS ALL GOD'S WILL
YOU'D BETTER HURRY OUT OF HERE... BEFORE I CHANGE MY MIND!
YOU'RE RIGHT. SINCE WE'RE STILL IN MOURNING, I'LL SPARE YOUR LIFE
ABOUT RAISA...
WHEN I FIRST SAW HER, I FELT THAT SHE WASN'T HUMAN
MAYBE... I WAS THE ONE WHO BROUGHT THE GODDESS OF DEATH TO THIS CITY
MAYBE YOU WON'T BELIEVE ME BUT I MEAN IT
...AND GOOD LUCK
LUCK TO YOU TOO.

RAISA!
SAMUEL...
Ha
STOP LAUGHING!
YOU PUT ON A PRETTY GOOD SHOW YOURSELF, TOO
Ha Ha Ha
Ha Ha Ha Ha
DID YOU FIND THE SHIP?
YEAH, AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SPRING
Ha Ha Ha
Ha Ha
OH MAN, THAT WAS SO FUNNY! JUST TOO COMICAL!
YOUR... THAT SPEECH THAT YOU PULLED OUT OF SOMEWHERE...!
Ha Ha Ha
Unusual humor!

THEY CREATED A BEAUTIFUL LEGEND, RESOLVING TO FORGET THE PAST
WHEN THEY REALIZED THE SHIP COULDN'T FLY ANYMORE THEY HAD TO ABANDON IT
THEY ALSO ABANDONED THEIR TECHNOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION AS THE HOPELESSNESS OF THEIR SITUATION SET IN
AFTER THE SHIP CRASH LANDED ON THE SURFACE, IT SANK DOZENS OF METERS INTO THE EARTH
THOUGH THE ENGINE WAS DAMAGED IN THE PROCESS, THE POWER IS RUNNING CONSTANTLY, SYNTHESIZING WATER UNDER THE GROUND
NO, IT ISN'T THIS IS WHAT REMAINS OF THE BIOENGINEERING EXPERIMENTS THAT USED TO BE SO POPULAR AND SUCCESSFUL!
IT'S A NATIVE LIFE FORM
chirp
SAMUEL
CAN'T I JUST BRING ONE BACK?
THEY MADE IT IN THEIR SHIP WHEN THEY WERE BORED
THAT THIS MAN-MADE SPECIES CAN ACTUALLY PROPAGATE IS AN IMPRESSIVE ACHIEVEMENT
AND THEY'RE EMPHATIC TOO!
THAT'S THE REAL FACE OF THE DRAGON THAT DWELLS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SPRING

IT EASES THE PERSON'S SUFFERING, AND THEY CAN DIE PEACEFULLY IN THEIR SLEEP.
TO THE PATIENTS, IT'S SOMETHING LIKE A SUBSTITUTE FOR MORPHINE.
THEY RESPOND TO THE BRAIN-WAVES HUMANS EMIT WHEN THEY'RE IN PAIN,
AND TRANSMIT A SPECIAL SOUND-WAVE.
"PEACEFUL DEATH."
IT'S FRENCH. IT MEANS...
EUTHANASIE!
THEY'RE CALLED "HARPYNA", AND ARE THE ATTENDANTS OF THE "GODDESS EUTHANASIE"!
AFTER A PEACEFUL DEATH, ARE THEY HOPING TO FIND A PARADISE?
THOSE POOR ORPHANS OF THE UNIVERSE...
HAVING LOST ALL COMMUNICATION, THEY WEREN'T ABLE TO RETURN. ISOLATED, THEIR CIVILIZATIONS BEGAN TO DEVOLVE.
JUST LIKE THEM, MANY OF THE EARLY INTERSTELLAR COLONISTS LEFT THE PLANNED ROUTES.

EVEN SO, THEY'VE KEPT THEMSELVES SEGREGATED AND ARE WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO PICK THEM UP
BUT IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT WITHIN JUST 400 YEARS, THEY'VE DEVOLVED TO SUCH A STATE
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO BRING THEM BACK
THEY'RE HAPPIER THIS WAY,
WHERE THEY CAN LIVE IN SUCH A BEAUTIFUL PARADISE
YES
YOU HAVE A POINT
LET'S GO
AND YOU TOO, HURRY BACK
RETURN TO THE PARADISE WHERE A GODDESS WATCHES OVER YOU...

Suna no Ue no Rakuen ♣ End

Boku wa Tabi wo Suru

Suna no Ue no Rakuen c02

"I Want to Travel"

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STORM IN HEAVEN
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Boku wa Tabi wo Suru

I Want to Travel

by Ima Ichiko

I SIMPLY CAN'T UNDERSTAND THAT...
KATSUKI... MY YOUNGER BROTHER, IS DEAD.
I THOUGHT THAT I WOULD SCREAM,
OR EMBRACE HIS BODY AND CRY.
IF NOT, THEN I WOULD SUPRESS THE URGE TO VOMIT AND RUN TO THE BATHROOM.
I THOUGHT I WOULD CERTAINLY DO THAT
I TOTALLY CANNOT UNDERSTAND...
EXCUSE ME

WHAT HAPPENED WAS...
WITHOUT LOOKING AT HIS FACE, I CAN'T BE SURE THAT HE IS OUR KATSUKI
THAT...
CAN WE SEE HIS FACE?
HOWEVER HE DIDN'T NOTICE THE OUTBOUND EXPRESS APPROACHING ON THE OTHER SIDE
AS A RESULT, THE TRAIN RAN OVER HIS BODY,
THE CROSSING GATES HAD ALREADY BEEN LOWERED, BUT YOUR SON STILL DECIDED TO CROSS THE TRACKS
AND DRAGGED IT ALONG FOR AS FAR AS 500 METERS THAT'S WHY HIS REMAINS ARE SCATTERED ALL OVER
INCLUDING THE HEAD, THERE ARE SEVERAL PARTS THAT STILL HAVEN'T BEEN RECOVERED YET...
THE HEAD...
HE ONLY FOCUSED ON THE INBOUND TRAIN
THEN IS THIS CORPSE HEADLESS?

I JUST CAN'T STAND YOU! YOU WON'T MAKE IT ON TIME!
I'M GOING RIGHT NOW!
OH... DIDN'T YOU SAY THAT YOU WERE GOING TO TAKE THE 4 O'CLOCK SUPER EXPRESS TRAIN?
THUD
THUD
THUD
THIS ALL HAPPENED BECAUSE THAT HABITUALLY TARDY GUY...
HAD RUSHED OUT...
A TRAIN'S DEPARTURE TIME IS SCHEDULED WELL IN ADVANCE. ALL YOU NEEDED TO DO WAS ESTIMATE A LITTLE AND YOU WOULD HAVE KNOWN WHEN TO LEAVE!
YOU TALK TOO MUCH!
GIMME A SEND-OFF!
BRING BACK SOME PRE-SENTS!
I'LL BE BACK ON SATURDAY NIGHT
I'M GOING!

IS THIS ALL THERE IS?
EXCUSE ME
YOU CONTACTED US AFTER LOOKING AT THIS
OH I SEE
AT THE MOMENT WE'VE ONLY RECOVERED THESE ITEMS
STUDENT ID CARD
THIS IS TO AUTHENTICATE THAT THE PERSON ON THE RIGHT IS A STUDENT AT THIS SCHOOL
HAVEN'T YOU FOUND A BLACK DUFFLE BAG?
OH?
A BIG BLACK ONE
MY YOUNGER BROTHER, HE LEFT THE HOUSE TODAY AT DUSK
HE AND HIS FRIEND, THE 2 OF THEM HAD PLANNED TO GO TO OSAKA FOR A 3 DAY 2 NIGHT TRIP
HE TOOK ALONG A BLACK DUFFLE BAG
LATELY, HE HAD BEEN BROODING ALL BY HIMSELF QUITE OFTEN
KATSUKI
WHAT HAPPENED, YOUNG MAN? WERE YOU DUMPED?
SHUT UP!

...WE'RE BACK.
HE'S SO SILLY ...
RUSHING OUT THE DOOR. HE'D EVEN FORGOTTEN HIS TRAVEL GUIDE.
THE PLACES THAT HE SHOULD BE TRAVELING TO...
THE HOTELS TO STAY IN
KANAZAWA
Friday
Kaga Hot Springs Hotel
Saturday
HE DIED EVEN BEFORE REACHING THE TRAIN STATION HE'S SO STUPID!
MOM!
DEAR!

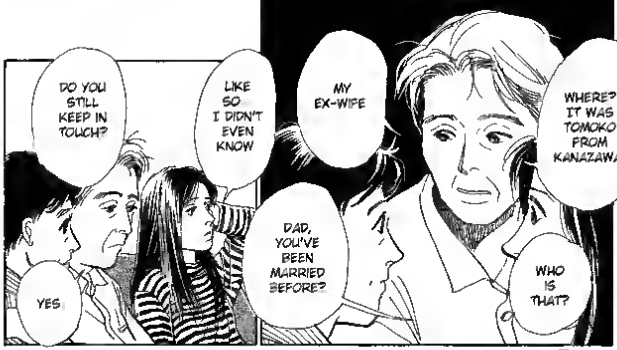
CALM DOWN JUST A LITTLE BIT! IT'S NOT CERTAIN YET THAT THE BODY IS REALLY KATSUKI!
NO! DON'T SAY ANYTHING! I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANYTHING!
MOM!
DEAR!
IT'S SO DARK, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
DAD, PLEASE DON'T BE SO EXPLICIT!
WHAT'S MORE, THAT CORPSE IS SO BADLY MANGLED THAT NOT EVEN THE HEAD REMAINS
TRUE, THAT STUDENT ID CARD REALLY BELONGS TO KATSUKI. HOWEVER, HIS CLOTHES ARE SO RIPPED UP THAT THERE ISN'T EVEN A SINGLE GOOD PIECE LEFT...
OH YES... IT'S THAT KITAMURA WHO ALWAYS COMES TO THE HOUSE.
DIDN'T KATSUKI SAY THAT HE WOULD BE TRAVELING WITH KITAMURA?
MOM...
WHAT?
HELLO, ARE YOU KITAMURA?
I'M SORRY BUT, KATSUKI HE WON'T BE ABLE TO GO TRAVELING WITH YOU TODAY
...DIDN'T PLAN ANY TRIP?
SHOULDN'T WE CALL SHIZUOKA AND KYUSHU FIRST?

TODAY, MY BROTHER DIED...

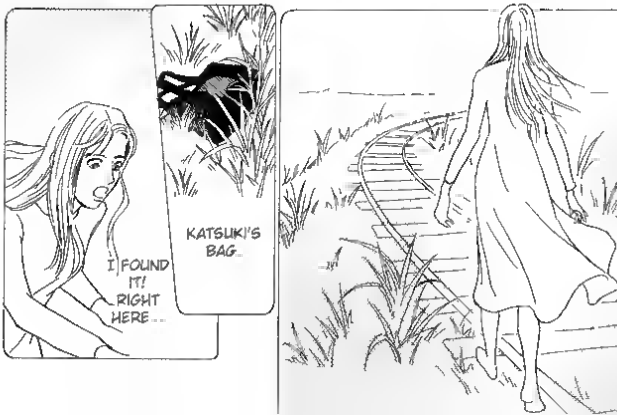
THE FINGERPRINT IDENTIFICATION WILL BE DONE TOMORROW.
HITOMI, BRING US SOME ITEMS THAT KATSUKI USES A LOT.
THIS JUST DOESN'T FEEL REAL.
IT'S LIKE A DOORBELL HAS RUNG. I JUST CAN'T FEEL ANY EMOTIONAL UPHEAVAL...
OR MAYBE IT'S BETTER TO WAIT UNTIL WE'RE SURE, AND THEN CALL...
THE POLICE SAID THEY WOULD CONTACT US IF THEY FIND THE HEAD.

THE ERASERS AND MAGAZINES STILL LIE EXACTLY WHERE KATSUKI LEFT THEM
WHAT'S TO BE DONE WITH HIS ROOM?
HOWEVER, IN A FEW HOURS TIME, THEY WON'T BE NEEDED ANYMORE
THERE'S NO DUST YET

THE DAY WILL COME WHEN WE MUST FINALLY DISPOSE OF THEM OURSELVES
THEY WILL NEVER BE USED AGAIN
ORDERING SUSHI WON'T BE TOO GOOD?
LET'S ORDER SUSHI TAKEOUT TONIGHT!
RING
RING
OUR HOME IS STILL LIKE WHAT IT WAS THIS MORNING, HOWEVER...
CHOP CHOP CHOP
CHOP CHOP CHOP
WHAT EXACTLY IS MOM TRYING TO COOK?
WHO WAS IT?
GOOD-BYE..
CLANG!
NOW ISN'T A GOOD TIME
HELLO ... OH, IT'S YOU?
TOMOKO FROM WHERE?
IT WAS TOMOKO.


DO YOU STILL KEEP IN TOUCH?
YES.
LIKE SO I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW
DAD, YOU'VE BEEN MARRIED BEFORE?
MY EX-WIFE
WHERE? IT WAS TOMOKO FROM KANAZAWA
WHO IS THAT?

NO ONE CRIES ANY TEARS

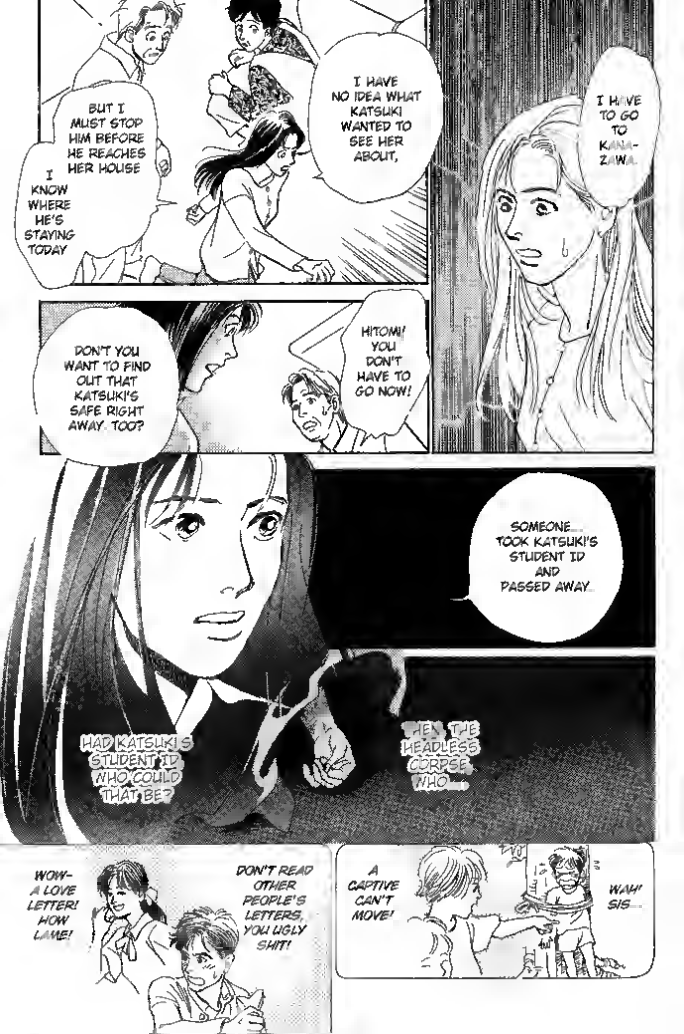


KATSUKI!
KATSUKI!!
WAIT A MINUTE!
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
HITOMI
KATSUKI WON'T COME BACK LEISURELY ON SUNDAY AS PLANNED, WILL HE?
SMILE
YOUR DAD HAS NEVER MENTIONED TO ME BEFORE THAT HE STILL KEEPS IN TOUCH WITH HIS EX-WIFE
ALL OF THIS IT COULDN'T JUST BE A DREAM, COULD IT?
AFTER ONE NIGHT YOU CAN JUST FORGET ABOUT IT?
LAST NIGHT. I DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHING ABOUT IT I JUST LISTENED AND THAT'S IT HOWEVER.

OUR CONTACT IS ONLY LIMITED TO LETTERS OR PHONE CALLS...
MOST IMPORTANTLY, SHE'S ALWAYS LIVED IN KANAZAWA!
KANAZAWA?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? NOW ISN'T THE TIME TO DISCUSS THIS!
...BUT I DO MIND!
THAT'S MY LINE! IT'S THE FIRST TIME I'VE HEARD THAT DAD WAS DIVORCED!
KITAMURA SAID HE HADN'T PLANNED A TRIP WITH KATSUKI!
YES! HE SAID TOGETHER WITH KITAMURA...
DIDN'T KATSUKI SAY THAT HE WAS GOING TO OSAKA?
WHY DID KATSUKI LIE AND RUN OFF BY HIMSELF TO KANAZAWA?
OH... THIS IS TASHIRO SORRY ABOUT LAST NIGHT...
DAD! WHY DON'T YOU CALL AND ASK?
I DON'T KNOW...
DAD, WHY DID AUNTIE TOMOKO CALL YOU?

...IT'S ABOUT THIS LAST NIGHT YOUR SON CALLED,
AND SAID THAT HE WOULD COME TO MY HOME TOMORROW, SUNDAY
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...
KATSUKI IS STILL ALIVE...?
KATSUKI ...WANTS TO GO TO YOUR HOME?
WAS THAT LAST NIGHT?
IT WAS AROUND 10:30 AT NIGHT. HE SAID THAT HE WAS STAYING AT THE KAGA HOT SPRINGS...
...IS THAT TRUE? KATSUKI CALLED YOU AT 10:30?
TASHIRO-SAN...
YES, HE WAS BY HIMSELF.
INDEED. HE STAYED HERE LAST NIGHT.
MOM! WAIT!
I'M GOING TO CALL THE KAGA HOTEL RIGHT NOW TO MAKE SURE!
WOBBLE

KOUICHI MAILED A THAN-YOU NOTE TO ME AFTER RECEIVING MY CONGRATULATIONS ON HIS NEW JOB
KATSUKI SAW IT.
KOUICHI?
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT HER!
WAIT A MINUTE! WHY WOULD KATSUKI WANT TO MEET THAT AUNTIE TOMOKO?
THAT'S SOMETHING THAT COULDN'T BE HELPED
THAT'S JUST TOO GOOD! HE'S STILL ALIVE
OH, IS THAT SO? THANK-YOU!
HOWEVER, HE HAS JUST LEFT
KATSUKI IS STILL ALIVE—
SHE HAS A SON
THAT'S
THE OTHER PERSON
SORRY!
SHE'S ALSO REMARRIED. IT'S YOUR FIRST MARRIAGE, SO I FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO TELL YOU.
...I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THIS...I ONLY KNEW THAT YOU WENT THROUGH A DIVORCE!

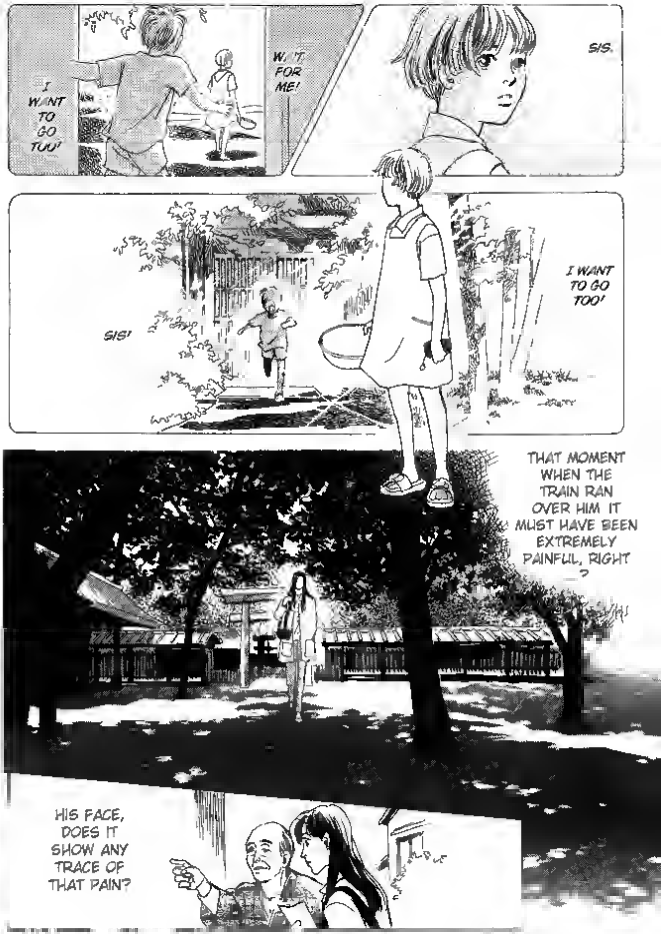

I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT KATSUKI WANTED TO SEE HER ABOUT.
BUT I MUST STOP HIM BEFORE HE REACHES HER HOUSE
I KNOW WHERE HE'S STAYING TODAY
I HAVE TO GO TO KANA-ZAWA.
HITOMI! YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO NOW!
DON'T YOU WANT TO FIND OUT THAT KATSUKI'S SAFE RIGHT AWAY, TOO?
SOMEONE... TOOK KATSUKI'S STUDENT ID AND PASSED AWAY...
HAD KATSUKI'S STUDENT ID WHO COULD THAT BE?
...HE'S THE HEADLESS CORPSE. WHO...
WOW- A LOVE LETTER! HOW LAME!
DON'T READ OTHER PEOPLE'S LETTERS, YOU UGLY SHIT!
A CAPTIVE CAN'T MOVE!
WAH! SIS...

I CAN ONLY RECALL THE TIMES WHEN I BULLIED HIM
WE PROBABLY DON'T GET ALONG WELL AS BROTHER AND SISTER
ARE YOU TASHIRO-SAN'S
YES, YES. HE'S A YOUNG STUDENT, ISN'T HE?
WAS HE CARRYING A BLACK DUFFLE BAG?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT WAS IN THERE BUT THE BAG LOOKED VERY HEAVY.
I OFFERED TO HELP HIM TAKE IT TO HIS ROOM
HE SAID THAT HE WOULD CARRY IT HIMSELF
YES.

DOES HE LOOK LIKE THIS?
I DON'T KNOW
OH! DIDN'T YOU TURN OUT HIS BED?
I'M SORRY. I DON'T KNOW
WHY?
BUT DIDN'T YOU HAVE A HAPPY LITTLE CHAT WITH HIM?
THIS
I'M NOT SURE WHY, BUT I JUST CAN'T RECALL WHAT HE LOOKED LIKE
I THOUGHT THAT WITH THE PHOTO, HE COULD BE IDENTIFIED IMMEDIATELY
FORGET IT. I'LL CATCH HIM IN PERSON AT THE HOTEL TONIGHT.
I'M TASHIRO'S SISTER.
...TASHIRO KATSUKI-SAN JUST CALLED.
HE SAID THAT HE WOULD BE STAYING AT ANOTHER PLACE INSTEAD. THAT'S WHY THE RESERVATION HAS BEEN CANCELLED.
WHAT ...!
KATSUKI ...!
YOU MADE ME COME ALL THE WAY HERE...!

OH... HITOMI, I WANT TO TELL YOU...
LISTEN TO ME KATSUKI, HE...
MOM? IT'S ME
SO, THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO. I'LL HAVE TO MEET UP WITH HIM TOMORROW AT AUNTIE TOMOKO'S HOME...
WHERE ON EARTH DID YOU GO, KATSUKI?
STAYING AT ANOTHER PLACE, WHAT HAPPENED...?
...
WHAT HAPPENED? YOUR VOICE SOUNDS STRANGE...
JUST NOW, THE POLICE CALLED...
IS MOM CRYING...?
WHAT?
THAT CORPSE...
THAT REALLY WAS KATSUKI
AFTER COMPARING THE FINGERPRINTS... IT'S BEEN DETERMINED THAT
THAT REALLY WAS KATSUKI...

YOU'RE LYING...
WHY ...!
YOU'RE LYING TO ME, AREN'T YOU?
NO, HOW CAN THIS BE! WHY...!
DIDN'T HE JUST CALL LAST NIGHT?
HE ALSO STAYED AT THE HOTEL THAT HE BOOKED...
TODAY, HE ALSO CALLED...
THEN WHO IS HE?
WHO HAS BEEN CARRYING KATSUKI'S BAG AND TRAVELING AROUND...
I'LL BE BACK ON SUNDAY NIGHT.
HITOMI, YOU GO AND BUY SOME TOFU.
OKAY.


I WANT TO GO TOO!
W..IT FOR ME!
SIS.
SIS!
I WANT TO GO TOO!
THAT MOMENT WHEN THE TRAIN RAN OVER HIM IT MUST HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY PAINFUL, RIGHT ?
HIS FACE, DOES IT SHOW ANY TRACE OF THAT PAIN?

HE HAD PLANNED TO MEET ON SUNDAY
I'VE EXPLAINED TO MY HUSBAND THE REASON AND ASKED HIM TO LEAVE THE HOUSE.
MY DAD, HE NEVER TOLD ME ANYTHING
PLEASE EXCUSE ME! THAT I CAME HERE SO SHAMELESSLY
MOM
TASHIRO HAS SUCH A BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER...

HE AND KATSUKI
REALLY LOOK ALIKE
NO KIDDING...?
SHE IS TOKYO TASHIRO-SAN'S DAUGHTER.
OH THERE'S A GUEST?
YOU'RE BACK
THIS IS MY SON, KOUICHI HE'S WORKING NOW AND LIVES IN THE COMPANY'S DORMITORY
OH! HOW ARE YOU? IT'S NICE TO MEET YOUR FOR THE FIRST TIME.
HE REALLY IS DAD'S SON
PLEASED TO MEET YOU. I'M TASHIRO HITOMI.
HE'S JUST RETURNED TO TOKYO
I WAS WORRIED THAT HE WOULD DO SOMETHING IMPROPER.
I HEARD THAT KATSUKI WAS COMING OVER TODAY...
OH! KATSUKI!
INCREDIBLE EVEN HIS VOICE SOUNDS SO MUCH ALIKE
HE'S MY OLDER BROTHER THEN?

WHAT...
IT'S LIKE THIS KATSUKI CAME TO VISIT ME AT THE DORM YESTERDAY
SINCE IT WAS SUCH A RARE OPPORTUNITY, I ASKED HIM TO STAY OVER THE 2 OF US KEPT DRINKING UNTIL THE MORNING...
IT WAS ALREADY MIDDAY WHEN WE WOKE UP
I DROVE HIM AROUND TOWN
AND CAME BACK HERE AFTER DROPPING HIM OFF AT THE STATION, JUST NOW
HE SAID THAT THERE WAS NO TIME LEFT, SO HE DIDN'T COME HERE AND WENT HOME DIRECTLY...
HE ASKED ME TO SAY HELLO TO YOU
WHAT DID YOU GUYS TALK ABOUT?
JUST ALL KINDS OF SILLY THINGS...

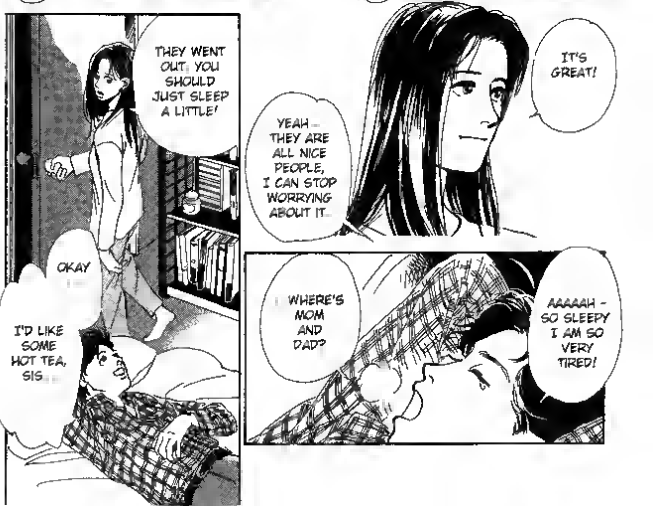
KATSUKI - HE'S JUST SO EXUBERANT.
OH. OLDER BROTHER
FINALLY, THE NEIGHBOR CAME AND YELLED AT US IN THE MORNING.
KATSUKI IS SO GOOD HE CAN CONNECT WITH ANOTHER GUY SO VERY QUICKLY
YOU AND KATSUKI REALLY DO LOOK SO MUCH ALIKE.
EH? IS THAT SO?
EH?
IT'S SO STRANGE WE SPENT THE NIGHT DRINKING TOGETHER AND I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE
THAT'S BECAUSE
HIS FACE
WELL THAT
WHAT?
IT WAS NOTHING EXCUSE ME.
NOTHING.
THANK-YOU VERY MUCH
Stay Longer next time!

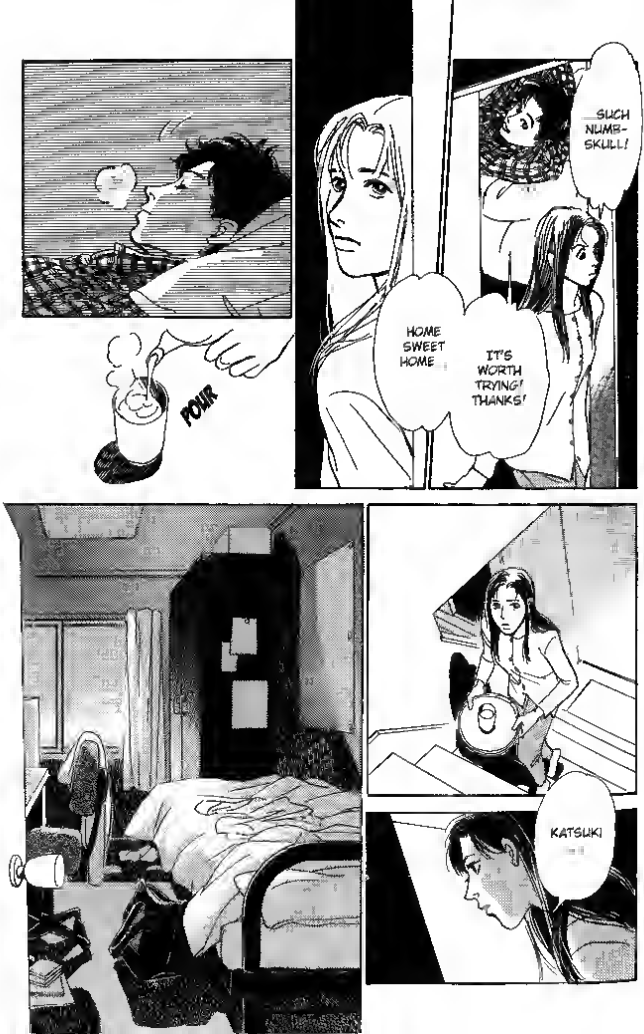
I'M BACK
CREAK
CREAK
SQUEAK

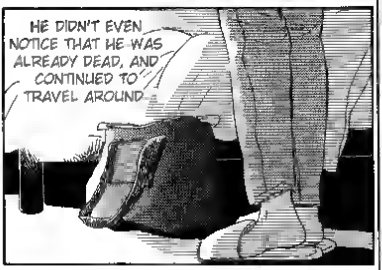
CREAK
CREAK
CREAK
CREAK
CREAK
CREAK
OH
YOU SCARED ME

KASTU...
...IDIOT!
HUH? REALLY? THEN YOU GUYS ALL KNOW?
YEAH! SHE CALLED!
WAH!
ASS-HOLE!
WHAT'S GOING ON? WHAT HAPPENED? WAH! WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

OH SHIT ...!
WHO TOLD YOU NOT TO TELL ANYONE BEFORE LEAVING, STUPID
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE HER FOR?
NOTHING MUCH... I JUST WANTED TO SEE HER.
KOUICHI DROVE ME AROUND... HE'S SUCH A FUNNY GUY.
WE DO LOOK SO MUCH ALIKE!
OH, SO THAT'S HOW


IT'S GREAT!
YEAH - THEY ARE ALL NICE PEOPLE, I CAN STOP WORRYING ABOUT IT.
THEY WENT OUT. YOU SHOULD JUST SLEEP A LITTLE!
OKAY
I'D LIKE SOME HOT TEA, SIS.
WHERE'S MOM AND DAD?
AAAAAH - SO SLEEPY I AM SO VERY TIRED!


SUCH NUMB-SKULL!
IT'S WORTH TRYING! THANKS!
HOME SWEET HOME
POUR
KATSUKI


HE DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE THAT HE WAS ALREADY DEAD, AND CONTINUED TO TRAVEL AROUND...

ZIP
HOWEVER, YOU DID COME BACK...

HE'S SO IMPATIENT...

YOUR SLEEPING FACE IS SO VERY PEACEFUL!
IT'S REALLY GREAT...
END

Let it Rain

Suna no Ue no Rakuen C03

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LET IT RAIN

YOUNG LADY WHERE'S YOUR HOME?
KAWASAKI
THAT'S REALLY FAR AWAY!
I WOULD RATHER TAKE YOU HOME BUT YOU'RE SO DRENCHED THAT YOU COULD CATCH A COLD!
MY HOME ISN'T TOO FAR AWAY FROM HERE YOU'LL BE BETTER OFF IF YOU CHANGE CLOTHES AT MY PLACE
HOW'S THAT?
THANK YOU!
I WOULD LIKE TO USE YOUR TELEPHONE AS WELL
SO DID YOU COME HERE ALL BY YOURSELF?
IT IS SUCH A HUGE DOWNPOUR. WHY DIDN'T YOU BRING AN UMBRELLA ALONG?
I DIDN'T THINK THAT IT WOULD RAIN
MOREOVER, I BELIEVE THAT THE RAIN WILL STOP SOON

BUT THIS WILL HELP SOLVE THE WATER SHORTAGE PROBLEM. THIS YEAR WAS SO BAD THAT A HEAT-WAVE LASTED FOR FORTY DAYS!
IT DIDN'T OCCUR TO ME THAT THE RAIN WOULD BE THIS HEAVY
I WONDER HOW LONG WILL IT KEEP ON POURING?
MY FRIENDS FROM KANSAI SAID THAT THEY DIDN'T HAVE WATER FOR SEVERAL HOURS EACH DAY!
AH IS THAT SO?
OH— DID THAT HAPPEN?
THERE IS EVEN WATER RATIONING IN TOKYO!
PERHAPS THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MEN?
BUT LUCKILY BECAUSE OF A HEAVY RAINFALL,
THE SOIL HAS BECOME LOOSE AND IS EASIER TO DIG THROUGH
DID YOU USE YOUR HANDS TO DIG?
YES BECAUSE I WANTED TO TAKE THIS HOME NO MATTER WHAT
HOWEVER BECAUSE OF IT, I'M COVERED IN MUD

I AM BACK, DEAR.
BRING A TOWEL OUT!
SORRY TO DISTURB YOU
SHE DOESN'T HAVE AN UMBRELLA AND IS COMPLETELY SOAKED! THAT'S WHY I TOOK HER HERE
AREN'T THERE ANY CLOTHES THAT SHE CAN CHANGE INTO? DIDN'T YUU-CHAN LEAVE SOME AT HOME?
THAT'S JUST PITIFUL I'LL PREPARE A BATH NOW
I'LL BRING OUT SOME CLOTHES FOR YOU TO CHANGE INTO A LITTLE LATER HERE'S THE TOWEL, I'LL LEAVE IT RIGHT HERE
THANK YOU VERY MUCH I'LL GO TAKE A BATH THEN
SHE LOOKS SO LIVELY AND SMART DID SHE COME TO THIS KIND OF MOUNTAIN JUST BY HERSELF?
DIDN'T YOU SAY SHE DOESN'T HAVE AN UMBRELLA?
OH YES— IT STARTED RAINING ALL OF A SUDDEN.
HEY— IS THERE A PLASTIC BAG SOMEWHERE?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
rustle
HUH?
YOU WERE THE ONE COMPLAINING ABOUT THE THREE DAYS OF CONTINUOUS RAINFALL, WEREN'T YOU?
ALSO, YOU'VE FORGOTTEN TO BUY MILK

YOU'VE BEEN GETTING MORE AND MORE FORGETFUL LATELY
I HOPE YOU AREN'T BECOMING SENILE!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT!? YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S SENILE!
OH... I'VE FINISHED MY BATH THANK YOU.
THESE ARE CLOTHES THAT MY GRAND-DAUGHTER LEFT BEHIND YOU CAN JUST CHANGE INTO THEM
EXCUSE ME... MAY I USE THE PHONE TO CALL MY FAMILY AND ASK THEM TO PICK ME UP?
OH YES...
MOM... IT'S ME, YUKARI
I WANT TO TELL YOU THAT IT'S RAINING NOW CAN YOU COME PICK ME UP? RIGHT NOW, I'M AT...
OH YOUR NAME IS YUKARI
I FEEL THAT I'VE SEEN YOU SOMEWHERE BEFORE... HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ON TV?
OH! THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE! I'VE NEVER BEEN ON TV...

DING DONG
THANK YOU
GIVE ME YOUR WET CLOTHES, I'LL HANG THEM UP FOR YOU
PERHAPS SHE JUST LOOKS LIKE A STAR
HUH? ETSUKO, WHY ARE YOU HERE ALL OF A SUDDEN?
MOM, DAD... OH, YOU'RE HOME!
THIS IS THE ONLY HOUSE ON THIS MOUNTAIN AND YOU TWO LIVE BY YOURSELVES I JUST THOUGHT SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENED!
WELL... I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO REACH YOU SINCE LAST NIGHT BUT NO ONE WOULD ANSWER THE PHONE!
WHAT HAPPENED? ARE YOU TRYING TO SCARE ME?
WE'VE BEEN HOME ALL ALONG! STRANGE... COULD IT BE THAT WE WERE IN THE BATHROOM?
WHERE DID YOU TWO GO?
HUH?
ARE YOU ALREADY SENILE?
THE WATER SHORTAGE WAS LAST YEAR!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? THIS YEAR IS A "COLD SUMMER"
THIS RAIN CAME JUST IN TIME! IT SHOULD SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF WATER SHORTAGE SHOULDN'T IT?
I EVEN THOUGHT THAT YOU GOT WASHED AWAY BY THE RAIN!

I'VE PUT THIS IN THE PLASTIC BAG FOR YOU.
OH! THANK YOU!
REALLY!? THAT'S NOT GOOD. I'VE GOT TO WASH THEM ONE MORE TIME.
YOUR HANDS ARE BLACK AGAIN.
...OH YOU'RE HERE?
BY THE WAY, YOU HAVEN'T COME BY FOR A WHILE. STAY A LITTLE LONGER!
YES— THAT'S RIGHT! MOM, THE ENTRANCE IS COVERED WITH MUD!
HOWEVER, MY HOME IS IN AN APARTMENT BUILDING— GUESS I CAN ONLY PLANT IT IN A FLOWER-POT.
DO YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF TREE THAT IS?
IT GROWS IN A PLACE THAT NEVER SEES THE LIGHT OF DAY, THAT'S WHY IT HASN'T TAKEN ANY ROOTS YET—
IT WAS VERY EASY FOR ME TO DIG IT UP.
I'VE ALWAYS MEANT TO HELP IT MOVE TO A PLACE WHERE IT CAN GET SOME SUNSHINE

IS THAT SO I HAD NO IDEA.
OH YES! THAT'S WHY IT CAN GROW INTO A BIG TREE.
IT'S AN OAK TREE
A TREE THAT WILL BEAR ACORNS
IT'LL BE A PITY IF YOU DON'T PLANT IT IN A BRIGHT SPOT!
OH? THIS WILL BEAR ACORNS?
IT WILL BEAR ACORNS
I BETTER FIND A GOOD PLACE FOR IT!
patter
SHE MUST BE TIRED...
LET HER SLEEP FOR A LITTLE WHILE BEFORE HER FAMILY COMES TO PICK HER UP
THUD
IT'S EVEN SOAKED INSIDE.
HER SCHOOL PASS...
YOKO-YAMA YUKARI, OH... FIFTH GRADE
THIS REALLY IS TOO DIRTY... ALL FULL OF MUD

OH DEAR! EVEN THE FLOOR IS COVERED WITH MUD
I HADN'T NOTICED
EVEN THE INSIDES OF THE POCKETS ARE COVERED WITH MUD
MAYBE SHE WAS KNEELING WHEN SHE DUG UP THE TREE?
IT'S JUST TOO DIRTY... IT HAS TO BE WASHED
JUST LIKE ETSUKO SAID... THERE IS MUD ALL OVER THE ENTRANCE
I SHOULD HAVE ASKED HER TO WIPE HER FEET BEFORE ENTERING
HUSBAND! THERE YOU ARE!
DID YOU STEP ON THE PHONE LINE?
NO BUT...
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO REACH YOU SINCE LAST NIGHT
THE PHONE LINE ISN'T CONNECTED NO WONDER THE PHONE CALLS COULDN'T REACH US
DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO BE MORE CAREFUL?

Yukari has been missing for a full year now.
BUT DON'T THAT CHILD JUST CALL HOME AND TALK TO HER MOM?
OH... HAVEN'T FOUND HER YET...
IT'S BEEN ONE YEAR ALREADY... MAYBE SHE WAS KIDNAPPED AND TAKEN TO ANOTHER COUNTRY?
IF NOT, THEN, SHE MUST HAVE BEEN KILLED AND BURIED IN THE MOUNTAINS.
WHAT'S THAT GIRL'S NAME?
Today, Yukari's school's Kawasaki Number 2 Primary school...
OH?
I DON'T KNOW... I DIDN'T ASK.
The clothes that Yukari was wearing when she disappeared are...
DAD... WHERE DID YOU PICK HER UP?
WHY DO YOU ASK...! DOES IT MATTER? YOU'LL JUST SAY THAT I AM SENILE OR FORGETFUL AGAIN ANYWAY!
DAD, THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT!
I... DON'T REMEMBER.
BY THE TIME I NOTICED ANYTHING, SHE WAS ALREADY INSIDE MY CAR...
WITHOUT ME EVEN NOTICING IT, IT'D ALREADY BEGUN TO GET DARK...
THE DAYS MUST HAVE SHORTENED...

JUST NOW... DID YOU REALLY PHONE HOME?
YUKARI, ARE YOU STILL ASLEEP?
DID THE CALL GET THROUGH?
I CALLED
YES
OH, IT WENT THROUGH! DAD SAID THAT HE WILL COME AND PICK ME UP RIGHT AWAY
HE'LL BE HERE ANY TIME NOW
AND AFTER I GET HOME, I MUST IMMEDIATELY FIND A GOOD PLACE TO PLANT IT
BECAUSE... IT'S BEEN GROWING IN A PLACE THAT NEVER SEES THE LIGHT OF DAY, THAT'S WHY IT HASN'T TAKEN ANY ROOTS...
LET IT RAIN ♣ END

Yoru no Mori no Soko ni

"At the Bottom of the Night Forest"

Suna no Ue no Rakuen c04

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YORUNOMORINOSOKOU
AT THE BOTTOM OF
THE NIGHT FOREST

WITH SO FEW PEOPLE COMING TO PAY RESPECT TO THE GRAVES IT GETS SO DESOLATE HERE!
WELL, THERE ARE SOME OTHER RELATIVES WHO ONLY COME BACK AROUND THIS TIME!
WE'RE PROBABLY THE ONLY ONES WHO WOULD COME HERE DURING THIS TIME IN MARCH
IF IT WEREN'T FOR THIS KIND OF OPPORTUNITY, I PROBABLY WOULDN'T BE VISITING THE HEAD HOUSE AND PAYING RESPECT TO THE GRAVES

AKIRA
YOU'VE NEVER MET HIM BEFORE HAVE YOU?
WHO IS HE? A RELATIVE?
YEAH, HE'S A RELATIVE
SORRY WE MADE YOU WAIT SO LONG, ASAKO.
OH—
IWAI—?
MY NAME IS IWAI ATSUSHI, PLEASED TO MEET YOU!
WE SHOULD BE HEADING BACK SAKURAKO AND JIROU SHOULD BE BACK ANY-TIME NOW!
OH YES— ATSUSHI'S MOTHER IS FROM THE HEAD HOUSE BUT AFTER MARRYING "OUTSIDE", HER SUR-NAME ISN'T KUNIE ANY MORE!
I'm Akira's cousin...
OH— MY NAME IS KUNIE ASAKO
I CAN READ PALMS
I'M VERY SPIRITUAL! YOU TOO, RIGHT?
PLEASED TO MEET YOU

TRYING TO GRAB PEOPLE'S HANDS AFTER SAYING THAT USED TO BE REALLY POPULAR
HAHA
HMM... AREN'T YOU AKIRA'S YOUNGER SISTER?
NOPE! I BELONG TO THE KUNIE FAMILY FROM TOCHIGI.
OH!
ATSUSHI
THEN YOU MUST BE REALLY "EXCELLENT!"
DON'T TRY TO BE A WISE GUY!
I GO TO THE LOCAL UNIVERSITY THAT'S WHY I'M LIVING AT THE HEAD HOUSE
ATSUSHI WILL STAY AT MY PLACE DURING SETSUKU*
IS THAT SO!
HOW DISAPPOINTING...
I THOUGHT I'D BE DRIVING AROUND WITH AKIRA - JUST THE TWO OF US...
INCLUDING SAKURAKO AND JIROU THE COUPLE FROM THE BRANCH FAMILY IN AMERICA, THEY'RE RETURNING FOR THIS OCCASION AFTER LEAVING JAPAN A YEAR AGO
SOON IT WILL BE GIRL'S DAY. MANY RELATIVES HAVE ALREADY RETURNED TO THE HEAD HOUSE...
THANK YOU FOR PICKING ME UP!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, IT'S MY TURN TO PICK UP AND DROP PEOPLE OFF.

* Seasonal festival in Japan, every 1/7 3/3 5/5 7/7 and 9/9 are all known as Setsuku

THE KUNIE FAMILY HAS A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT TRADITION
GIRL'S DAY IS A MORE IMPORTANT FESTIVAL THAN EITHER OBON FESTIVAL OR NEW YEAR'S DAY

THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS TO DO. IF YOU WANT TO VISIT THE GRAVES, YOU SHOULD WAIT FOR SAKURAKO AND THEN GO TOMORROW...
VISITING THE GRAVES
SHE'S THE HEAD HOUSE'S WIDOW, AUNTIE JUN...
AKIRA'S MOTHER
PERHAPS THAT'S BECAUSE THE KUNIE FAMILY IS A MATRIARCHY
ATSUSHI-CHAN?
ASAKO, WHERE HAVE YOU TWO BEEN? EVERYONE'S SO VERY BUSY RIGHT NOW!
AKIRA!
DIDN'T I JUST SEE A BIG, PINK DOLL?
ANYWAY, YOU SHOULD GO AND GREET THE ELDERS FIRST.
WHY DID YOU PICK NOW TO COME HERE?
WELL... HOW MANY YEARS HAS IT BEEN? WHY ARE YOU HERE?
HOW ARE YOU? IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, AUNTIE JUN.

AUNTS
ATSUSHI FROM IWAI IS HERE
ATSUSHI FROM IWAI?
SO ATSUSHI IS HERE?
HE'S THE SON OF SUMIKO, THAT FUMIHIKO'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER
OH... THE ONE WHO MARRIED "OUTSIDE"
GRANNIES, I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU ALL FOR A LONG TIME HOW ARE YOU?
NOTHING MAKES ME HAPPIER THAN TO SEE YOU ALL IN SUCH GOOD HEALTH.
HOW COME HE'S STARTING TO LOOK MORE AND MORE LIKE SUMIKO
YOUR MOTHER WENT AGAINST OUR ADVICE AND MARRIED AN OUTSIDER
WHY HAVE YOU RETURNED TO THE HEAD HOUSE NOW?
ALSO, YOU'VE BEEN FORBIDDEN TO ENTER THE HEAD HOUSE, HAVEN'T YOU?

AKIRA!
ASAKO!
PLEASE EXCUSE US FOR NOW.
THERE REALLY SHOULD BE A TIME LIMIT TO THINGS
OH GRANDMA, CUT ME SOME SLACK!
WE'LL PICK YOUR SPOUSES FOR YOU!
YOU WILL OBEY US, WON'T YOU?
THAT IS HOW IT SHOULD BE YOUNG PEOPLE NOWADAYS ARE SO IMPETUOUS
WE HAVE ALL MARRIED ACCORDING TO THE INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE HEAD HOUSE
I ABSOLUTELY WON'T!
I WON'T LET THE HEAD HOUSE DETERMINE MY MARRIAGE!
CALM DOWN!
THEY WERE TOO MUCH YOUR MOM JUST MARRIED SOME OTHER GUY, THAT'S ALL
AND THEY EVEN BANNED YOU FROM THE HEAD HOUSE
AREN'T YOU ANGRY?
ISN'T IT GREAT TO BE HERE?
THOSE ENDANGERED ANIMALS ARE STILL ALIVE?
HA HA HA
I HADN'T SEEN SUCH RARE CREATURES IN SUCH A LONG TIME...
HA HA HA

YEAH YEAH... AND ALSO, THAT ISN'T THE REASON I WAS BANNED FROM THE HEAD HOUSE
THAT HAPPENED DURING THE ELDER'S GENERATION.
THERE ARE MANY OTHER PEOPLE WHO MARRIED OUTSIDE THE CLAN
YURIKO, HE WILL ALSO BE STAYING HERE TODAY
OH! SHE ALSO LIVES HERE.
YOU TOO AKIRA
OH! ASAKO, YOU'RE FINALLY BACK!
He's at it again
What's the matter with him?
YOU'RE SPIRITUALLY IN TUNE!
MY NAME IS IWAI I CAN READ PALMS
COME AND HELP QUICKLY! THERE ARE MORE AND MORE GUESTS!
THAT'S WHY SHE AND THE HEAD HOUSE'S AKIRA ARE LIKE CHILDHOOD SWEETHEARTS.
OH, REGARDING "AKIRA"...
THE "PRINCE OF THE HEAD HOUSE" IS NONE TOO EASY FOR ME TO COZY UP WITH...
I CAN'T WIN...
KUNIE YURIKO WAS BORN IN KYUSHU. IN ORDER TO ATTEND THE MUSIC UNIVERSITY, SHE ACCEPTED ASSISTANCE FROM THE HEAD HOUSE. SHE'S BEEN LIVING AT THE HOUSE SINCE MIDDLE SCHOOL.

THE SISTERS FROM OKAYAMA HAVE ALREADY ARRIVED
UNCLE AND AUNTIE FROM HACHIOJI, WELCOME!
DO WE HAVE ENOUGH COMFORTERS?
OH YUKARI, YOU'VE GROWN UP!
YOU'D BETTER COME OVER HERE AND HELP RIGHT AWAY!
WAIT!
ASK THE KIDS TO GO PLAY IN THE LIVING ROOM.
IS THIS THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE MET HIM TOO?
HE SAID HE'S BEEN HERE BEFORE.
HE SAID THAT I'M SPIRITUALLY IN TUNE! I DIDN'T KNOW WE HAD THAT KIND OF RELATIVE!
ASAKO, HAVE YOU TALKED TO THAT WEIRD GUY?
BOTH YURIKO'S AND MY OWN PARENTS, AND THE ELDERS HERE — ALL OF THEM DID THAT —
IT USED TO BE THAT THE KUNIE FAMILY ONLY MARRIED RELATIVES
Oh ...
AFTER MARRYING OUTSIDE, THEY DON'T COME VISIT THAT OFTEN
MUST BE A LONG TIME AGO, RIGHT?
THROUGH THE WORLD WARS, ECONOMIC DEPRESSION, OIL CRISIS, AND COLLAPSE OF THE BUBBLE ECONOMY
THE FAMILY SURVIVED THEM ALL BY WORKING TOGETHER, AND ALWAYS MANAGED TO INCREASE ITS FORTUNES
THAT'S WHY ALMOST EVERYONE CARRIES "KUNIE" AS THE FAMILY NAME.
FROM THE MEIJI ERA ONWARDS WE'VE BEEN RUNNING A FAMILY BUSINESS

ASAKO
THAT'S WHY A KUNIE GIRL WILL BE MINDFUL OF CERTAIN GUYS AMONGST HER RELATIVES
IN ORDER TO PROTECT ITS TIES AND ASSETS, THE KUNIES HAVE ALWAYS MARRIED WITHIN THE CLAN
NO... I THOUGHT THAT IT WAS AKIRA WHO ASKED HIM TO COME HERE FOR THE SETSUKU...
HAVE YOU HEARD WHAT IWAI ATSUSHI CAME HERE FOR?
OH!
YES! ELDER AUNTIE...
WHERE'S KOICHI?
HE WENT TO NARITA TO PICK UP SAKURAKO AND COMPANY...
YOU SHOULD STAY WITH ATSUSHI AND KEEP AN EYE ON HIM!
AFTER DOING SOMETHING LIKE THAT, HOW DARE...
REGARDLESS, HIS GOAL MUST BE THE HEAD HOUSE'S WEALTH!
YES
SISTER, UNCLE!
SAKURAKO AND JIROU ARE BACK!
BECAUSE THE KUNIE FAMILY IS SO TIGHTLY KNIT TOGETHER,
WE'RE VERY XENOPHOBIC
She must be like that!

WOW, YOU CAME BACK FROM AMERICA!
HOW WAS THE FLIGHT?
YURIKO, I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU FOR A YEAR!
I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE HEAD HOUSE'S BUSINESS, BUT THERE SEEMS TO BE AN OFFICE OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT IN AMERICA.
FIVE YEARS AGO, THE FAMILY ASSIGNED THE COUPLE FROM THE BRANCH FAMILY, SAKURAKO AND JIROU, TO WORK OVER THERE.
THE TURBULENCE WAS TREMENDOUS! COME, HERE'S A GIFT FOR YOU
DUTY FREE
AUNTIE JUN, WE'RE BACK!
WELCOME BACK!
THIS BRIGHT PINK CLOTHING, THAT I JUST SAW IN THE GARDEN...
YOU JUST CAME BACK FROM THE AIRPORT?
THIS...
OH YES! THEY CAME DIRECTLY FROM NARITA
OH!
YEAH... OH YES.
I HEARD THAT THE COLD FRONT WAS VERY STRONG
HMM?

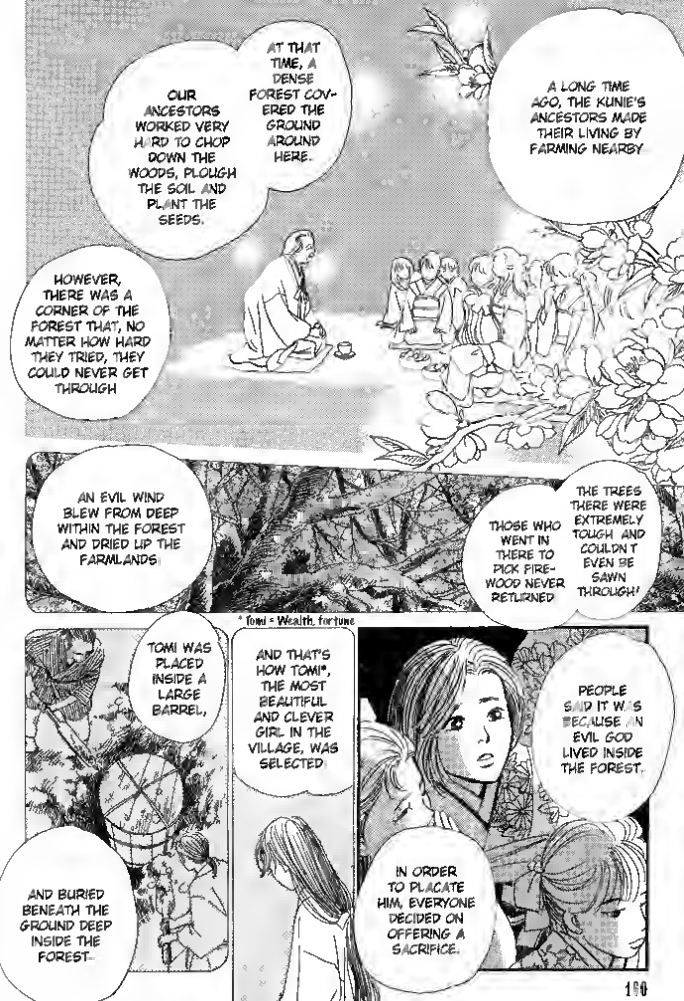
AUNTIES, WE'RE BACK.
SAKURAKO, JIROU.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR HARD WORK.
THE YEARLY CELEBRATION OF GIRL'S DAY BEGAN AFTER THE RETURN OF THE COUPLE AND THAT OSTENTATIOUS GREETING
GIRLS MUST WEAR KIMONOS!
C'MON OVER! BOYS, GO TO THE ROOM NEXT DOOR.
GIMMIE THAT!
DO WE HAVE THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF BOWLS AND CHOPSTICKS?
CAN I BRING THIS OUT?

Oh ahh—
WOW
THOSE ARE THE EMPEROR AND EMPRESS!
WOW!
DON'T ANYONE TOUCH HER!
DOLLS FOR GIRL'S DAY!
Wa
Wa
Wa
Ha Ha Ha...
I'LL EXPLAIN IT TO YOU. BE QUIET EVERYONE! THIS IS THE EMPEROR AND EMPRESS...
IT MUST BE REALLY TIRING.
WAH!
GOTTA DO THIS EVERY YEAR. I'M SO DAMN TIRED...
ASAKO, WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CANDIES AND COOKIES?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE!?
THANKS FOR YOUR WORK
THERE SIMPLY WEREN'T ENOUGH...
droop

THIS YEAR THERE ARE 21 GIRLS
INCLUDING ADULTS, AROUND 60 OR 70? BUT NOT EVERYONE WILL STAY HERE
HOW TIRING HOW MANY PEOPLE CAME TODAY?
EVERYONE SEEMS SO BUSY I JUST CAME HERE TO GRAB A BITE
Here time same to us!
I'm dead tired
THEN YOU MUST HAVE COME HERE BEFORE
BUT THE GIRLS MUST COME HERE AT LEAST ONCE WHEN THEY'RE YOUNG
THEY DON'T COME HERE EVERY YEAR
DO ALL THE GIRLS IN THE KUNIE FAMILY GATHER HERE DURING GIRL'S DAY?
BACK THEN I WAS SO WILD
WHEN I LOOK AT IT NOW, IT ALL SEEMS SO BEAUTIFUL BUT WHEN I WAS SMALL, IT WAS JUST BORING
WHEN I WAS FIVE OR SIX, I CAME HERE ONCE BUT I DON'T REALLY REMEMBER.
OH, YOU'RE HERE?
YOU TWO SHOULD GO AND GREET THE OTHERS
DURING GIRL'S DAY, THERE WILL BE LANTERNS LIT UP AT THE HEAD HOUSE
BRIGHTLY COLORED KIMONOS, AND PEACH BLOSSOMS

YOUR MOM MARRIED AN OUTSIDER, SO THAT'S WHY THERE'S KARMIC RETRIBUTION—
AREN'T YOU IWAI ATSUSHI? SUMIKO'S SON?
THUD
AW! ASAKO! YOU'VE GOTTEN SO PRETTY!
COME AND HAVE A DRINK WITH ME!
WHAT KIND OF JOKE IS THIS? DOESN'T THAT CUSTOM BELONG TO THE PAST?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, ASAKO?
SINCE I'M FROM THE BRANCH FAMILY, THERE'S NO NEED TO BE PARTICULARLY WORRIED ABOUT ME
IT'S— STILL TOO EARLY!
SOMEONE WITH MARRIAGE PROSPECTS HAVEN'T THE AUNTIES DECIDED FOR YOU YET?
A BOYFRIEND—?
TWENTY YEARS OLD
ASAKO, YOU'RE A COLLEGE STUDENT, AREN'T YOU? HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW?
THEN YOU'RE AN ADULT DO YOU HAVE A BOYFRIEND YET?
THE HEAD HOUSE BEGETS THE BRANCH FAMILY— YOU MUST OBEY THE ELDERS' DECISION!
EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE FROM THE BRANCH FAMILY, YOU'VE RECEIVED SO MUCH HELP FROM THE HEAD HOUSE
WHAT ON EARTH DID SHE MEAN BY "THE HEAD HOUSE BEGET'S THE BRANCH FAMILY?"
SHE'S BEEN IN AMERICA FOR FIVE YEARS, YET SHE HASN'T BEEN AMERICANIZED AT ALL— HOW AMAZING—
I ALWAYS FEEL THAT SHE LOOKS SO VERY PROPER
SAKURAKO, SHE—

LIKE THIS...
BUT SOME GUYS IN THE BRANCH FAMILY LOOK LIKE THIS
WHAT A JOKE! IF THEY PICK AKIRA THEN IT ISN'T A PROBLEM, OF COURSE
SPSH
IF ONLY I COULD BE AS SURE OF MYSELF AS SAKURAKO
I'M ALSO A KUNIE, BUT I
I'VE ALREADY BEEN HERE FOR A YEAR, YET I STILL CAN'T GET USED TO IT
EVER SINCE I WAS SMALL, I'VE ALWAYS FELT THAT THIS FAMILY IS SCARY
THE ELDERS WILL START TELLING A STORY
GIRLS GO TO THE BIG ROOM!
NOW THEN...
LET ME TELL YOU WHY WE MUST HOST THE SETSUKU...
IT'S A YEARLY TRADITION TO LISTEN TO THE ELDERS TELL THE STORY
I'VE LISTENED TO THE SAME STORY FOR 8 YEARS.
I HATE THIS...


A LONG TIME AGO, THE KUNIE'S ANCESTORS MADE THEIR LIVING BY FARMING NEARBY
AT THAT TIME, A DENSE FOREST COVERED THE GROUND AROUND HERE.
OUR ANCESTORS WORKED VERY HARD TO CHOP DOWN THE WOODS, PLOUGH THE SOIL AND PLANT THE SEEDS.
HOWEVER, THERE WAS A CORNER OF THE FOREST THAT, NO MATTER HOW HARD THEY TRIED, THEY COULD NEVER GET THROUGH
THE TREES THERE WERE EXTREMELY TOUGH AND COULDN'T EVEN BE SAWN THROUGH!
THOSE WHO WENT IN THERE TO PICK FIREWOOD NEVER RETURNED
AN EVIL WIND BLEW FROM DEEP WITHIN THE FOREST AND DRIED UP THE FARMLANDS
PEOPLE SAID IT WAS BECAUSE AN EVIL GOD LIVED INSIDE THE FOREST.
IN ORDER TO PLACATE HIM, EVERYONE DECIDED ON OFFERING A SACRIFICE.
AND THAT'S HOW TOMI*, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND CLEVER GIRL IN THE VILLAGE, WAS SELECTED
TOMI WAS PLACED INSIDE A LARGE BARREL,
AND BURIED BENEATH THE GROUND DEEP INSIDE THE FOREST.

* Tomi = Wealth, fortune

AND THEN, THE EVIL WIND THAT BLEW FROM THE FOREST SUDDENLY STOPPED.
SO OUR ANCESTORS WERE ABLE TO GO INSIDE THE FOREST TO LOG MORE AND BETTER QUALITY WOOD. HAVING CLEARED THE LAND THEY GAINED MORE FARMLAND AT THE SAME TIME
TOMI, WHO WAS BURIED UNDERGROUND, HAS CONTINUED TO LIVE INSIDE THE "BARREL" FOR A VERY LONG TIME
WHEN YOU GO INTO THE FOREST ON SILENT NIGHTS, TOMI'S VOICE CAN BE HEARD COMING UP FROM THE EARTH
SHE USED TO TELL US IF THE YEAR WOULD BE HOT, WHICH RIVER WOULD OVERFLOW...
AND WHAT SHOULD BE PLANTED IN WHICH PLOT
TOMI GAVE A LOT OF ADVICE TO OUR CLAN, AND EVERYTHING SHE SAID CAME TRUE
WE OWE OUR AFFLUENT LIFESTYLE COMPLETELY TO HER
TONK
OUCH!
YOU REALLY SCARED ME!
MEN ARE FORBIDDEN TO COME HERE

ALSO, TELLING KIDS SUCH A CRUEL STORY IS TOO MUCH
ALL THAT STUFF ABOUT SACRIFICE AND BEING BURIED ALIVE...
IT'S JUST OUTDATED!
LIKE IT'S A MATTER OF COURSE FOR A WOMAN TO BE SACRIFICED FOR THE SAKE OF THE FAMILY!
... AFTER A LONG TIME, TOMI'S VOICE BECAME FAINTER AND FAINTER.
THAT'S WHEN WE DECIDED TO SELECT A GIRL WITH VERY SHARP HEARING FROM THE CLAN TO SERVE AS THE "LISTENER".
IS IT OKAY FOR YOU TO STAY OUT HERE?
THAT DOESN'T MATTER! I JUST WANT TO LISTEN.
I HATE LISTENING TO THAT STORY.
WHAT HAPPENED ...?
THE FIRST TIME THAT I PARTICIPATED IN IT...
FROM LISTENING TO SUCH STORIES BEFORE BEDTIME!
THE KIDS WILL ALL GET NIGHTMARES...
WE OWE IT ALL TO TOMI THAT THE KUNIES ARE STILL PROSPEROUS TODAY.
EVERY SUCCESSIVE GENERATION FACING DIFFICULTIES AND DOUBTS WILL ALWAYS GO TO THE FOREST TO SEEK GUIDANCE FROM TOMI
WHEN A "LISTENER" GROWS OLDER, WE SELECT THE NEXT "LISTENER"
NOTHING ANYWAY, I WAS JUST REALLY SCARED THAT'S ALL.

GRANDMA, IS THERE A "LISTENER" NOW?
I DON'T KNOW... THE FOREST HAS BEEN COMPLETELY CHOPPED UP
OH YES!
AND ALSO, ON THIS DAY, TOMI WILL EMERGE FROM THE EARTH AND CELEBRATE THE FESTIVITIES WITH EVERYONE.
THAT'S WHY, IN ORDER TO COMFORT THE TWELVE-YEAR-OLD TOMI WHO WAS BURIED BENEATH THE EARTH,
ALL THE GIRLS IN THE KUNIE CLAN GATHER EVERY YEAR ON GIRL'S DAY, THE THIRD DAY OF THE THIRD MONTH, TO HELP HER CELEBRATE BY DECORATING WITH FLOWERS AND DOLLS
S-sorry! Wait!
GRANDMA, WHERE IS THAT FOREST, THEN?
HUH?
Huh?
WHERE, WHERE IS SHE?
THAT'S A SECRET AMONGST US ELDERS
TOMI... DOES THAT MEAN BRINGING "WEALTH"...
IT COULD ALSO MEAN THE ABILITY TO FORESEE THE FUTURE AS IN "FORESIGHT", COULDN'T IT?"
IN OTHER WORDS TOMI HAS BECOME A LIVING GODDESS
NO WAY...
THERE'S NO WAY THAT I COULD ACCEPT THAT...
TOMI IS THE GUARDIAN GODDESS WHO BRINGS THE FAMILY WEALTH.

* Tomi (wealth) has the same pronunciation as Tomi (foresight)

I'VE ALWAYS FELT THAT WE'VE BEEN LIED TO.
ISN'T THIS JUST A BONE-CHILLING STORY?
YEAH, IT'LL GET MY IMAGINATION GOING.
Don't you think so?
HASN'T THIS IMAGE EVER OCCURRED TO YOU?
INSIDE A PITCH-BLACK HOUSE... THERE'S A HOLE IN THE FLOOR...
THERE'S SOMETHING WHITE THAT LOOKS LIKE A HUMAN SHADOW PEEKING OUT OF IT...
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HIM
BYE NOW, ASAKO!
Take care!
Drink some more!
SAGURA'S GRANDPA IS LOOKING FOR YOU. HE WANTS YOU TO READ HIS PALM.
HAS THAT IMAGE EVER OCCURRED TO YOU?
OH, HERE YOU ARE!
BU
UP

DARN... THAT'S ALL BECAUSE OF THOSE CRAZY THINGS HE SAID
IT MADE ME ENVISION THAT SO CLEARLY
NO! I CAN'T STAND IT! I'M GOING CRAZY!
SAKU-RAKO
SAKU-RAKO?
... BUT BOTH OF YOU ARE STILL YOUNG,
AND IT'S ONLY BEEN JUST FIVE YEARS, HASN'T IT?
I'M BEGGING YOU, PLEASE DECIDE ON THE NEXT CHOICE! THERE MUST BE A CANDIDATE?
OKAY?
DON'T GIVE UP! I ALSO SERVED FOR EIGHT YEARS
SAKU-RAKO
IN REALITY, IT'S VERY HARD ON HER TO BE IN AMERICA.
WOW! I HAVEN'T BEEN BACK FOR SO LONG!
IT'S JUST BETTER HERE!
EVERYTHING LOOKS SO BEAUTIFUL!
WHERE DO YOU WANNA GO, SAKU-RAKO?
TAKE A LOOK AT THAT! JIROU!
Tokyo Dotonbori

WOW, WHAT'S THIS? IT'S SO CUTE...
Sakurako you're too cute!
OH, BUT THAT'S ALSO VERY PRETTY!
I'LL BUY THIS ONE TOO!
IS JAPAN SUCH A BIG DEAL?
ISN'T IT CHEAPER TO BUY THIS IN AMERICA?
YEAH, BUT OVER THERE I'M SO BUSY WITH WORK THAT I HARDLY EVER HAVE TIME TO GO OUT.
What a waste.
COME TO THINK OF IT...
FOR LIVING IN CALIFORNIA,
ISN'T THEIR SKIN A BIT TOO PALE
ATSUSHI.
SORRY, I REALLY WOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU MORE
BUT MOM AND ALL OF THEM ARE REALLY TIGHTLIPPED THERE ARE LOTS OF THINGS THAT I HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING...

BUT WHAT DO YOU REALLY EXPECT FROM ME?
CHANGE, I SUPPOSE...
CHANGE IN WHAT?
DON'T SAY THAT. I'M REALLY GRATEFUL
YOU'VE TOLD ME SO MUCH ABOUT THE KUNIE FAMILY AND INVITED ME TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SETSUKU
A CERTAIN PART OF THIS FAMILY...
OR MAYBE IN IT'S ENTIRETY... PERHAPS?
...IT'S TOUGH TO BE THE ELDEST SON IN THE HEAD HOUSE...
THIS FAMILY, THE ELDERS TOMI THE FATE OF THE CLAN...
TO HAVE TO SHOULDER SUCH RESPONSIBILITY. IN THE END, I CAN'T EVEN DECIDE WHO I MARRY... I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE
I THINK YOU'RE SOMEONE WHO CAN CHANGE THINGS...
DON'T THINK SO HIGHLY OF ME...
FIRST OF ALL,
IT MIGHT NOT BE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER.

THAT'S ALSO FINE
SORRY TO HAVE MADE YOU WAIT SO LONG...
WHAT?
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO, THEN I'LL RUN AWAY BY MYSELF!
IT'S DRIVING ME CRAZY!
LET GO OF ME!
SAKURAKO IS ARGUING...?
SAKURA...

THANK
AHH
SCREEEE
HER LIFE ISN'T IN DANGER,
BUT THERE'S A BROKEN BONE NEAR HER WAIST, SO
WHERE'S SAKURAKO!?
ASAKO!

AN ABORTION?
SHE HADN'T NOTICED IT HERSELF YET.
PERHAPS IT'S BECAUSE OF THIS THAT SHE ISN'T TOO EMOTIONALLY STABLE... SHE RUSHED OUT ALL OF A SUDDEN...
DOCTOR, SHE HAS GREAT RESPONSIBILITIES.
HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR HER TO RECOVER?
AT LEAST HALF A YEAR...
EVEN ONCE THE WOUNDS AND BROKEN BONES HEAL, SHE WILL STILL NEED TO UNDERGO PHYSICAL THERAPY BEFORE SHE CAN WALK AGAIN...
HALF A YEAR...
SLAP
YOU WERE WITH HER, SO HOW DID THIS HAPPEN!
BROTHER, DON'T DO THIS!
UNCLE!
LOOK WHAT YOU DID!
WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO WITHOUT THE "LISTENER"!?
ASAKO, ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
CALM DOWN, THIS IS DISGRACEFUL
DON'T HIT HER! IT WASN'T HER FAULT!

SAKURAKO CAN'T CONTINUE WORKING ANY LONGER.
THERE'S NO USE IN MAKING A SCENE HERE. RATHER, IT'S MORE IMPORTANT TO RETURN IMMEDIATELY AND DISCUSS THE MATTER.
YOU OKAY? CALM DOWN A BIT...
IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT.
.... WE CAN'T ALLOW HAVING NO ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR HALF A YEAR.
IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH IF TOMI IS ANGERED...
THERE'S NO OTHER WAY,
SOMEONE ELSE MUST SUBSTITUTE IN.
WE NEED TO DECIDE ON THE NEXT CANDIDATE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
Asako!
What's the matter? Isn't it nduku now?
MOM, I WANT TO TELL YOU
NOTHING
HELLO?
MOM, IT'S ME

OF COURSE, LIVING HERE MEANS THAT I CAN SEE AKIRA — THAT'S WHAT I TRULY YEARN FOR
AFTER PASSING THE UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAM I'VE BEEN LIVING AT THE HEAD HOUSE AND TAKING ALL THAT FOR GRANTED
WHY AM I HERE...
I WANT TO GO HOME DURING THE NEXT BREAK...
YES...
ALMOST EVERY SINGLE DAY I WAS IN THE GARDEN JUST RUNNING AROUND AND MESSING THINGS UP...
I DON'T REALLY REMEMBER MY FIRST SETSUKU MAYBE THAT'S BECAUSE...
CLEARLY, I'M AFRAID OF THIS HOME
I'VE JUST BEEN FEELING A LITTLE BIT LOST...
MY ACCOMPLICE HAD ALWAYS BEEN AKIRA...
IT WAS AS IF WE KNEW WHAT THE OTHER WAS THINKING JUST BY SHARING A LOOK
WE GOT ALONG SO WELL THE FIRST TIME WE MET
THE TWO OF US DIDN'T GET TIRED OF EACH OTHER, EVEN THOUGH WE PLAYED ALL DAY LONG...
THE AKIRA WHOM I HADN'T SEEN FOR OVER TEN YEARS IS NO LONGER THAT LITTLE PUNK FROM BEFORE...
HOWEVER, THE MAGIC FROM THAT CHILDHOOD IS GONE...
IN MY CHILD'S MIND, I SECRETLY IMAGINED THAT I WOULD GROW UP TO BE HIS BRIDE...

EVEN NOW, I STILL CALL HIM "AKIRA"...
I WAS SO NAIVE, AND THOUGHT THAT BY COMING HERE, I COULD GO BACK TO MY CHILDHOOD...
"IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF YOU! LOOK WHAT YOU DID!"
I'VE BEEN SCOLDED LIKE THAT BEFORE...
IT WAS WHEN THE TWO OF US WERE NAUGHTY
"WE CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO COME TO THIS HOUSE EVER AGAIN."
"LOOK AT WHAT YOU DID!"
"YOU DID SO MANY THINGS..."
WHAT EXACTLY DID WE DO...
HMM...
THAT'S RIGHT, IT SEEMS UNCLE SAID SOMETHING CURIOUS...
"WITHOUT THE LISTENER..."

SAKURAKO IS IN THE HOSPITAL. HOWEVER, EVERYTHING WON'T CHANGE...
THE SETSUKU CELEBRATION WILL CONTINUE.
TOMI WILL GET ANGRY IF THE CELEBRATION IS SUDDENLY CANCELLED.
WHEN SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENS, IT REALLY ISN'T APPROPRIATE TO CELEBRATE THE SETSUKU ANY MORE
She pushed out the words of a sudden
WHAT!?
SAKURAKO WAS IN A CAR ACCIDENT!
HOW ARE HER INJURIES?
HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN? WASN'T ASAKO WITH HER?
JIROU WAS THERE TOO.

TO PUT IT SIMPLY, IT'S TO FULFILL YOUR WISHES BY USING OTHER PEOPLE'S POWER.
AS FOR YOUR MARRIAGE PROSPECTS, THEY'LL IMPROVE IN TWO YEARS.
There's a chance!
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, GRANDPA? DIDN'T YOU JUST SAY THAT THE HEAD HOUSE HAS HELPED YOU ONCE?
IN TWO YEARS? I'M ALREADY 86
OH OH OH
HOW ARE YOU, ASAKO?
IF YOU STRIKE OUT ON YOUR OWN, YOU WILL CERTAINLY FAIL AND KEEP BORROWING MONEY
HOWEVER, YOU WILL DEFINITELY GET HELP FROM YOUR RELATIVES.

YOU WANT TO GET ASAKO'S ATTENTION AND KEEP HITTING ON HER?
BUT!
YOU'RE A UNIVERSITY STUDENT!
HA HA
DON'T WORRY, I'M SELF-EMPLOYED.
I WORK AS A FORTUNE TELLER IN THE GINZA DISTRICT.
Tomoko, you can come over here too!
This old man has to bring in there a little longer.
I'VE HEARD THAT THINGS DIDN'T REALLY WORK OUT YESTERDAY. ARE YOU OKAY?
DON'T YOU HAVE TO GO BACK FOR WORK AND STUFF
I'M NOT SURE IF HE'S JUST TOO CLEVER OR IF YOU JUST CAN'T RESENT HIM
BE CAREFUL WITH THIS GUY!
STRANGE GUY WHEN DID HE START GETTING ALONG WITH EVERYONE SO WELL?
MY COMPANY IS HAVING SOME DIFFICULT TIMES
CAN TOMI TELL ME WHAT TO DO?
THEN WHY DON'T YOU TAKE OVER, JUN!?
PLEASE DON'T MAKE UNREASONABLE REQUESTS. WE DON'T HAVE A "LISTENER" RIGHT NOW.
I CAN'T DO IT ANY LONGER. SINCE I'M OLDER, MY "EARS" AREN'T AS SENSITIVE
AUNTIE
THE ELDERS ARE ASKING FOR YOU
WHAT'S THE MATTER, ASAKO?
JUST NOW... WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?
THANK YOU.

SHE MENTIONED THE "LISTENER" AGAIN...
IS THERE SOMEONE REALLY DOING THAT?
THEN LET ME SERVE AS THE "OVERSEER."
SINCE YOU'RE OLDER NOW, I DON'T FEEL COMFORTABLE GIVING YOU THIS KIND OF SLEEP-DEPRIVING WORK.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT!?
YOU WILL DEFINITELY FALL ASLEEP IN THE MIDDLE OF IT
BUT I WAKE UP EARLIER THAN YOU!
AUNTIE I CAN ALSO SERVE AS THE "OVERSEER."
THEN TONIGHT THESE THREE WILL BE THE "OVERSEERS."
AGREED
GIRLS! TONIGHT WE'LL ALL SLEEP IN THIS BIG ROOM!
IT'S OKAY IF YOU DON'T SLEEP WITH YOUR MOM!
PILLOW FIGHTS ARE ONLY ALLOWED UNTIL NINE!
WAH!
LET'S GO! YOU HAVE TO PEE BEFORE GOING TO BED
WHAT A BUNCH OF STUPID KIDS I MIGHT JUST KILL ONE OF THEM!
Damn! My neck hurts!
I'M NOT THE BIG SISTER WHO LED THE EXERCISE CLASS!

ALRIGHTY... IT MAKES ME FEEL BETTER JUST BY THINKING THAT THIS YEAR IS THE LAST YEAR FOR THIS POINTLESS TRADITION..
WHAT!?
YURIKO, YOU CAN'T BE THINKING ABOUT RUNNING AWAY FROM HERE?
IT'S A SECRET!
WITH AUNTIE JUN OVER THERE, I CAN'T TALK RIGHT NOW..
I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT IT NEXT TIME..
AT THAT TIME, I REALLY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT YURIKO'S MOTIVE WAS
BUT EVENTS QUICKLY UNFOLDED AND REVEALED A DIFFERENT REALITY
WHAT KIND OF MEMORIES WILL THESE KIDS HAVE?
I DON'T WANT TO RECALL... MY FIRST SETSUKU
I CAN'T RECALL...

I JUST REMEMBER PLAYING WITH AKIRA
WHAT WAS IT THAT MADE THEM SO AFRAID ...?
AT THAT TIME, THEY WERE SO ANGRY...
AT THAT TIME, THERE WAS SOMEONE ELSE BY MY SIDE
ALTHOUGH BACK THEN, I STILL PRETENDED NOT TO KNOW ANYTHING...
SHE WAS SOMEONE A LITTLE OLDER THAN I WAS
BUT I STILL PRETENDED NOT TO KNOW. AND CONTINUED PLAYING
THE TRUTH IS, IN MY HEART, I'D KNOWN FOR A LONG TIME THAT THE "BIG SISTER" WAS VERY SCARY...
OH... NO!
AND IT SEEMS SO VERY REAL.
ALMOST AS IF SHE'S REALLY STANDING RIGHT THERE
WHY AM I REMEMBERING THIS NOW...

I'VE FALLEN ASLEEP WITHOUT KNOWING IT.
YES... THIS IS A DREAM.
WHY AM I SEEING IT SO CLEARLY? I KNOW I'VE CLOSED MY EYES
NO...
OH...
DON'T DO THIS...
PLEASE, DON'T SAY ANYTHING!
AHH

WAH!
ASAKO! WHAT HAPPENED!?
WAH!
WAH!
RIGHT... RIGHT BEHIND ME...!
ARE YOU OKAY? WAS IT A NIGHTMARE?
ASAKO
THERE'S NOTHING THERE...?
WHAT'S THERE? A MOUSE? WHAT'S THE MATTER?
DIDN'T EVERYONE HEAR THAT NOISE?
THE NOISE—?
I'M REALLY SPOOKED...
WAH!
So scary!
Mommy!

ASAKO
I DON'T EVER WANT TO HEAR THAT KIND OF NOISE AGAIN
AS#KO.
AS#KO.
UNCLE, TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF.
whisper
YOU TOO, AUNTIE.
GOOD-BYE.
I MUST BE TIRED...
TO HAVE SUCH A WEIRD DREAM
WE'VE ALL REACHED A CONSENSUS.
ASA!! COME AGAIN NEXT TIME!
GOODBYE.
WE'VE DECIDED THE NEXT "LISTENER" WILL BE AS#KO...

IWAI, YOU'RE UP EARLY TODAY.
That's unusual!
THE SETSUKU CELEBRATION IS FAST COMING TO AN END. THE KIDS AND RELATIVES WILL ALL BE GONE SOON.
IT'S ALL HIS FAULT, FOR SAYING THOSE STRANGE THINGS...
HE HASN'T LEFT YET?
IWAI ATSUSHI...
I HAVE TO GO TO SLEEP NOW. I'VE BEEN STAYING UP ALL NIGHT KEEPING UNCLE KAZUYA COMPANY.
HO HO HO
PLAYING MAH-JONG AGAIN?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

YOU'RE HERE JUST IN TIME THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT
WERE YOU SLEEPING IN THIS ROOM THE LAST TIME YOU HAD A NIGHTMARE?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
AREN'T YOU GOING TO GO TO SLEEP NOW?
WELL, YES
MY SIXTH SENSE IS STRONGER WHEN I'M SLEEP DE-PRIVED
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?
REALLY, YOU CAN'T TRUST THIS GUY
IT WOULDN'T BE IN AN INCONVENIENT PLACE...
CLACK
I FOUND IT! IT REALLY IS HERE!
I FOUND IT...!

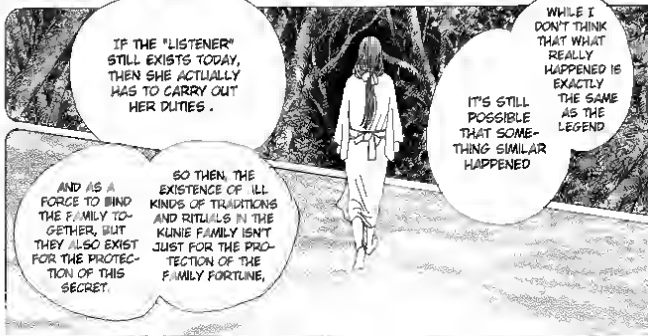
LET'S GO DOWN AND TAKE A LOOK!
OKAY
A BASEMENT?
A SECRET DOOR
INSIDE THE CLOSET?
I DIDN'T KNOW THERE WAS A BASEMENT HERE.
DON'T
YOU CAN'T JUST GO IN THERE!
IT'S SO DARK AREN'T YOU AFRAID?
IT'S PITCH BLACK IN HERE...
IT'S VERY DANGEROUS WITHOUT ANY LIGHT
CLICK
THE ELDERS WILL GET ANGRY THAT YOU JUST BARGED IN HERE.
WAIT, WAIT!

IT'S AMAZING. I WONDER WHEN IT WAS BUILT...
WHAT... IS THIS? TO HAVE THIS KIND OF ROOM UNDERGROUND...
IS THIS... A BOMB SHELTER? OR A NUCLEAR HIDEOUT?
HA HA HA
WHY WOULD THEY BUILD THOSE SO CLOSE TO THE SURFACE?
THEN... IS IT A TEMPORARY GUEST ROOM?
BUT... THIS PLACE FEELS LIVED IN.
WHAT...
THESE ARE...
PHOTOS OF SAKURAKO AND JIROU!
WHAT IS THIS PLACE FOR? WHO LIVES HERE?

THERE'S SOME-ONE IN THE ROOM NEXT DOOR
KNOCK
WAH!
IF WE DON'T CHECK IT OUT, HOW WILL WE KNOW!
WE'D... BETTER GO...!
WAIT A MINUTE!
HMM?
I FEEL LIKE I HAVE DEJA VU!

NOW WHAT? THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NO ONE HERE.
A... COFFIN ...?
IT MUST BE RATS! LET'S GO!
IT LOOKS LIKE THERE'S SOMETHING INSIDE.
IT'S FOR WORSHIPPING THE SPIRIT ENSHRINED HERE.
THIS IS TOMI
YESTERDAY I WENT TO THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS TO MAKE A COPY OF AN OLD MAP
AKIRA GAVE ME A COPY OF THE BOOK HANDED DOWN THROUGH THE GENERATIONS AT THE HEAD HOUSE
TOMI IS BURIED RIGHT HERE
ON THIS MAP, THERE ARE STILL SOME TREES REMAINING, RIGHT?

THIS PLACE USED TO BE A FOREST.
DON'T YOU FEEL THAT BY BUILDING THIS HOUSE, THEY WERE TRYING TO SEAL SOMETHING?
THIS MAP BASICALLY DELINEATES THE OUTLINE OF THE ORIGINAL HOUSE.
ACCORDING TO GRANDPA, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE SOME REBUILT STRUCTURES, THE BASIC LOCATION REMAINS UNCHANGED.
LOOKING AT THESE TWO SIDE BY SIDE
THIS BUILDING IS BUILT RIGHT ON TOP OF WHERE TOMI WAS BURIED


IF THE "LISTENER" STILL EXISTS TODAY, THEN SHE ACTUALLY HAS TO CARRY OUT HER DUTIES.
AND AS A FORCE TO BIND THE FAMILY TOGETHER, BUT THEY ALSO EXIST FOR THE PROTECTION OF THIS SECRET.
SO THEN, THE EXISTENCE OF ILL KINDS OF TRADITIONS AND RITUALS IN THE KUNIE FAMILY ISN'T JUST FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE FAMILY FORTUNE,
IT'S STILL POSSIBLE THAT SOMETHING SIMILAR HAPPENED
WHILE I DON'T THINK THAT WHAT REALLY HAPPENED IS EXACTLY THE SAME AS THE LEGEND

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?
DID YOU COME HERE TO FIGURE THIS OUT?
WHY ARE YOU INVESTIGATING ALL THIS—?
...I HAVE NIGHT-MARES.
I'VE BEEN HAVING NIGHT-MARES SINCE I WAS LITTLE...
I DREAM OF THE ONLY SETSUKI THAT I'VE EVER ATTENDED, WHEN I WAS SIX.

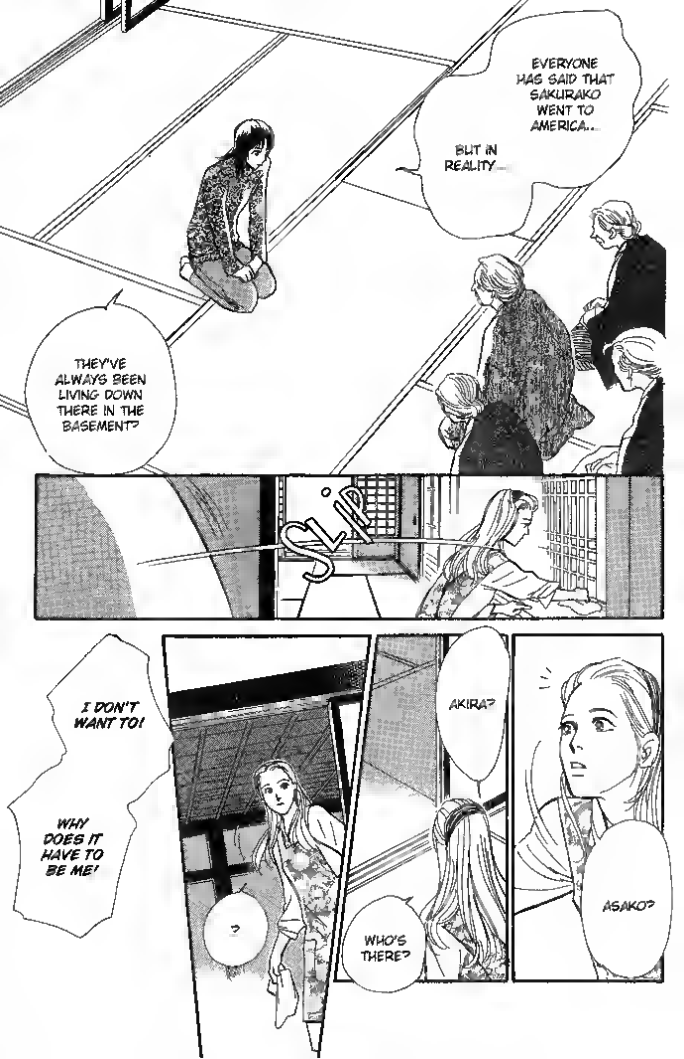
I CAME HERE BECAUSE IF I CAN PROVE THAT IT WASN'T JUST A DREAM, THAT WILL BE GOOD ENOUGH.
MY MEMORY IS VERY HAZY, AND I CAN'T TELL IF IT WAS JUST A DREAM OR ACTUALLY HAPPENED
BUT IN MY DREAM, I'M ALWAYS RUNNING AWAY WITH A GIRL, AND I KEEP WORRYING THAT I WON'T BE ABLE TO PROTECT HER.
YOU CAN'T DO THAT!
STOP...!
CLATTER
— WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
DON'T YOU WANT TO SEE IF THE BODY OF THE SPIRIT IS ENSHRINED HERE?
TAKE A LOOK, ASAKO!
UGH!

IT'S AN OLD DOLL
THIS IS THE REAL FACE OF TOMI
LEGENDS ARE USUALLY JUST LIKE THIS
I THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE A CORPSE IN HERE...
PAGH...
BACK THEN, I WAS SIX...
TURNS OUT THAT I WAS JUST A TIMID KID
BY THE WAY, ASAKO...
DID THIS JOLT YOUR MEMORY? DURING YOUR FIRST SETSUKU
HM?
RUSTLE
WHAT?

RATTLE
TREMBLE
CLACK
IT GOT LOOSE? LET ME TIE IT UP AGAIN...
ATSUSHI...
HURRY, ASAKO! LET'S GO!

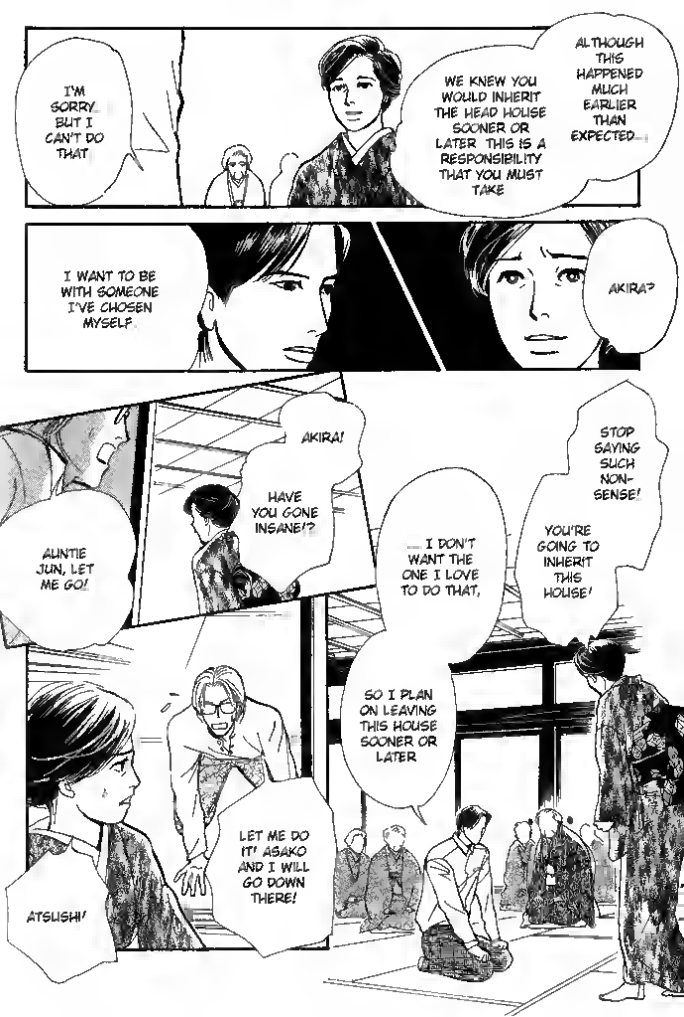
SLIDE
SFX CLATTER
I WAS JUST SO AFRAID THAT I'D FORGOTTEN IT ALL...
SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENED BEFORE
ASAKO
FLUFF
FLUFF
FLUFF
WHY DID I BELIEVE ALL ALONG THAT TOMI ISN'T A GUARDIAN SPIRIT?
WHY I WAS SO SCARED AT THAT TIME...

OH, THERE YOU ARE
COME WITH ME, THERE'S SOMETHING THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.
... SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAPPENED TO SAKURIKO.
ASAKO
WE'VE DISCUSSED THIS AMONGST OURSELVES
WE WANT YOU TO CARRY ON SAKURAKO'S WORK ALONGSIDE AKIRA.
AKIRA AND I...?
WE'RE GOING TO AMERICA?
SAKURAKO'S WORK, MEANING WHAT...?
WE NEED A NEW "LISTENER".
WE ALSO HOPE THAT YOU WILL GRADUATE BUT THAT ISN'T ANYTHING WE CAN HELP WITH.
ANYWAY, THIS MATTER IS URGENT.
HER LIVING ... IN AMERICA IS JUST A LIE?
SAKURAKO IS THE "LISTENER", ISN'T SHE?


EVERYONE HAS SAID THAT SAKURAKO WENT TO AMERICA...
BUT IN REALITY...
THEY'VE ALWAYS BEEN LIVING DOWN THERE IN THE BASEMENT?
SLIP
I DON'T WANT TO!
WHY DOES IT HAVE TO BE ME!
?
AKIRA?
WHO'S THERE?
ASAKO?

YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN CHOSEN. YOU HAVE THE BEST HEARING IN THIS FAMILY.
SEVERAL NIGHTS AGO,
YOU HEARD TOMI'S VOICE, DIDN'T YOU?
IT WILL ONLY BE A FEW YEARS... YOU JUST HAVE TO ENDURE IT UNTIL THE NEXT "LISTENER" IS CHOSEN.
WE WILL TRY OUR BEST TO SHORTEN THE TIME...
THE ELDERS AND MYSELF HAVE ALSO BEEN THROUGH THIS RESPONSIBILITY.
AFTER YOUR TERM IS OVER, THE HEAD HOUSE WILL PROVIDE FOR YOU.
DON'T WORRY, YOU'LL HAVE EVERYTHING DOWN THERE. WE'LL SEND YOU WHATEVER YOU WANT.
AND EACH YEAR YOU CAN SPEND A WEEK OUTSIDE, TOO!
AKIRA WILL ALSO BE THERE TO LEND YOU HIS SUPPORT.
THAT'S THE REASON YOU LET US STAY HERE.
THE PURPOSE OF THE SETSUKU IS TO FIND THE "LISTENER"!
YURIKO AND I WERE ALSO TALENTED?
WHAT'S MORE, WE'VE ALREADY FOUND SEVERAL TALENTED KIDS.

I COMPLETELY REFUSE! I CAN'T STAY IN THAT KIND OF A PLACE!
I'LL LEAVE THIS FAMILY ...!
BASH
ASAKO!
AUNTIE, WHY DID YOU DO THAT?
WHAT IF SHE'S HURT?
IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY? WE DON'T HAVE THE TIME TO CONVINCE HER.
JUST TAKE THIS CHANCE AND SEND HER UNDERGROUND
TOMI WILL GET LONELY IF WE CONTINUE TO LEAVE HER THERE BY HERSELF.
... THE NEXT "LISTENER" IS ASAKO, ISN'T IT?


I'M SORRY... BUT I CAN'T DO THAT
WE KNEW YOU WOULD INHERIT THE HEAD HOUSE SOONER OR LATER. THIS IS A RESPONSIBILITY THAT YOU MUST TAKE
ALTHOUGH THIS HAPPENED MUCH EARLIER THAN EXPECTED...
I WANT TO BE WITH SOMEONE I'VE CHOSEN MYSELF.
AKIRA?
AUNTIE JUN, LET ME GO!
AKIRA!
HAVE YOU GONE INSANE!?
STOP SAYING SUCH NON-SENSE!
... I DON'T WANT THE ONE I LOVE TO DO THAT.
YOU'RE GOING TO INHERIT THIS HOUSE!
ATSUSHI!
LET ME DO IT! ASAKO AND I WILL GO DOWN THERE!
SO I PLAN ON LEAVING THIS HOUSE SOONER OR LATER

HURRY, ASAKO! LET'S GO!
I DON'T EVER WANT TO HEAR THAT KIND OF NOISE AGAIN
WHO WAS WITH ME BACK THEN ?
COULD IT BE — THAT I HEARD SOME-THING LIKE THAT BEFORE?

WHO IS IT?
WHO'S THERE?
THAT NOISE DIDN'T BELONG TO ANYTHING ALIVE.
I WON'T BE IMPRISONED FOR YEARS IN A BASEMENT WITHOUT SUNLIGHT TO BECOME A MEDIUM FOR A DEAD PERSON.
THIS...
IS THIS THE BASEMENT?
WE CAN ONLY LOCK HER UP TEMPORARILY
WE JUST NEED TO SLOWLY CONVINCE HER AND SHE'LL BECOME OBEDIENT.
wobble
NO!
THE LIGHT... WHERE'S THE SWITCH!
wobble

IT'S TOO BAD THAT THE EXCHANGE IS SO RUSHED THIS TIME...
THAT HURTS! DON'T PULL SO HARD!
AH!
HELP!
AHHH
HELP!
KIYO-KATSU AND HIKARU ... HAVE BEEN ABDUCTED ...
AUNTIE?

TOMI...
TOMI IS WANDERING AROUND THE HOUSE
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT...! WHAT HAPPENED?
OH YES... WHY WOULD SHE KNOW ABOUT THE BASEMENT...?
SHE SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE...
A DISASTER WILL HAPPEN...!
WHO WAS IT... SOMEONE DEFILED THE SPIRIT'S BODY!
ASAKO...
THAT'S WHY TOMI HAS AWAKENED!
DID YOU GO TO THE BASEMENT?
DO SOMETHING AGAIN?
ATSUSHI...
DID YOU...

WHEN YOU AND ASUKO WERE FIVE AND SIX YEARS OLD,
YES...
SLAP
YOU TWO WENT TO THE BASEMENT LIKE YOU WERE SUMMONED BY TOMI...
CHILD... LOOK AT WHAT YOU'VE DONE!
YOU DESTROYED THE SEAL AND INCURRED TOMI'S WRATH! YOU OUGHT TO HAVE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ABOUT HOW TERRIFYING THAT IS!
BUT YOU'RE A BOY, AND DESPITE YOUR KUNIE BLOOD, SIRED BY AN OUTSIDER...
IF YOU WERE A GIRL, I WOULD HAVE DONE WHATEVER IT TOOK TO BRING YOU TO THE HEAD HOUSE AND MAKE YOU THE "LISTENER"...
OHH, I DON'T WANT TO GO TO THE BASEMENT!
IT TURNS OUT THAT YOU REALLY HAVE BROUGHT DISASTER TO THE KUNIE FAMILY
ATSUSHI...!
IF WE DON'T HURRY UP AND RESEAL THIS...

I HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE FIRST. WHY DON'T YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS AND LEAVE NOW.
I HAVE TO TAKE ASAKO WITH ME.
THEY'RE PANICKING... THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO
shock
WHAT WAS THAT JUST NOW...?
AH!
THE ROOM WITH THE SPIRIT'S BODY..

ATSUSHI!
DON'T WORRY! THEY'RE BOTH STILL ALIVE
WHO DID THAT...
HEY BABE, I'VE COME TO RESCUE YOU!
THAT'S GRANNY KIYO-KATSU AND HIKARU
IT'S TERRIBLE THAT THEY'RE STUFFED INSIDE LIKE THAT
TOMI
SINCE I DESTROYED THE SEAL,
SHE'S WANDERING AROUND THE HOUSE RIGHT NOW
IT'S TRUE THAT FOR A LONG TIME THE KUNIES HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING TOMI'S ADVICE AND RECEIVING LOTS OF BENEFITS
SO A "LISTENER" IS JUST LIKE A MEDIUM WHO LISTENS FOR TOMI'S VOICE?
IN ORDER TO PROTECT ITS INTERESTS THE HEAD HOUSE HIDES THE EXISTENCE OF THE "LISTENER" FROM MOST FAMILY MEMBERS
THEY'VE MADE UP THE LIE ABOUT SOME "AMERICAN BRANCH OFFICE"
THE "LISTENER" WILL SNEAK OUT FROM THE SECRET DOOR BEFORE THE SETSUBUN
AND PRETEND THEY'VE JUST RETURNED FROM ABROAD
SO IT REALLY WAS SAKURAKO WHO I SAW IN THE GARDEN...

dejected
HE WAS ALWAYS A WELL-BEHAVED CHILD.
I... ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT WAS AKIRA.
IT WOULDN'T HAVE OCCURRED TO ANYONE THAT TWO NAUGHTY KIDS ATTENDING THE SETSUKU... WOULD HAVE DISCOVERED THE SECRET DOOR AND MANAGED TO SNEAK INSIDE TO TAKE A LOOK RIGHT?
OH, I'D ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE YOU!
KUNIE ASAKO.
I SEE... HE LOOKS A LITTLE BIT LIKE AKIRA
THE SIX-YEAR-OLD'S PRANK WAS QUICKLY DISCOVERED BY THE ADULTS. HOWEVER, IN ORDER TO STOP THE MATTER FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND--
THEY MUST HAVE HAD SOME MEANS TO RESEAL IT
LET'S WAIT UNTIL THE GRANNIES CALM DOWN AND THEN WE CAN ASK THEM.
Hmm
LET ME TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THAT COFFIN
YOU AND AKIRA HAD BETTER LEAVE
I'M COMING ALONG.

IT WAS THE TWO OF US BACK THEN,
SO IF WE THINK ABOUT IT TOGETHER, MAYBE WE CAN REMEMBER SOMETHING.
AKIRA!
YURIKO, QUICK!
WHERE DID ASAKO GO...
WHAT'S EVERYONE ARGUING ABOUT TONIGHT?
FORGET IT! QUICKLY!
WHA...

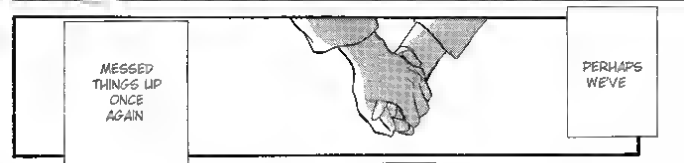
IT HAS TO BE THIS DOLL, DOESN'T IT?
I THINK THIS HAS TO BE THE KEY TO IT.
WHAT DID THE GRANNIES TO WITH IT...
OH!
YURIKO!
HELP ME! AKIRA!
HOW SHOULD WE DEAL WITH THIS —

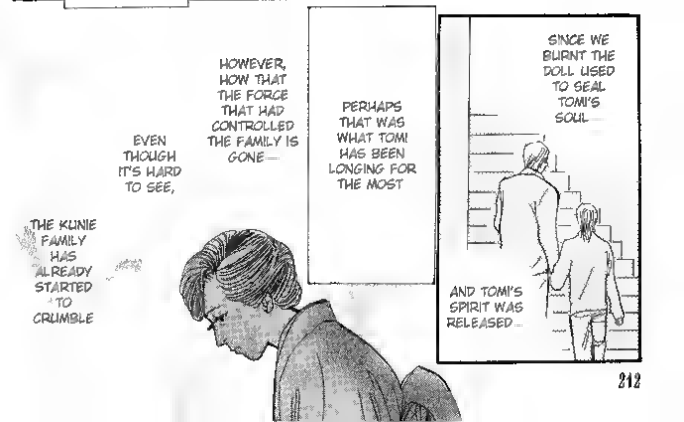
SINCE THIS IS IN THE BARREL,
IT HAS TO BE TOMI, RIGHT?
YEAH... EVEN IF IT'S ONLY SYMBOLIC, IT'S STILL TOMI'S BODY, ISN'T IT?
SO THEN...
IF THE BODY DISAPPEARS,
THEN WON'T TOMI'S EXISTENCE ALSO DISAPPEAR...?
YES! WE'VE ONLY BEEN THINKING ABOUT THE SEAL...
YURIKO!
I CAN'T HOLD ON ANY LONGER! I'M GOING TO FALL...!
IF TOMI'S BODY DISAPPEARS...
KCHNK
AHH...

AH
AHAHAHA
AHAHAHA
AHAHAHA
AHAHAHA
AHAHAHA
AHAHAHA
AHAHAHA
THANK YOU.
I HAVE TO LEAVE
GOODBYE

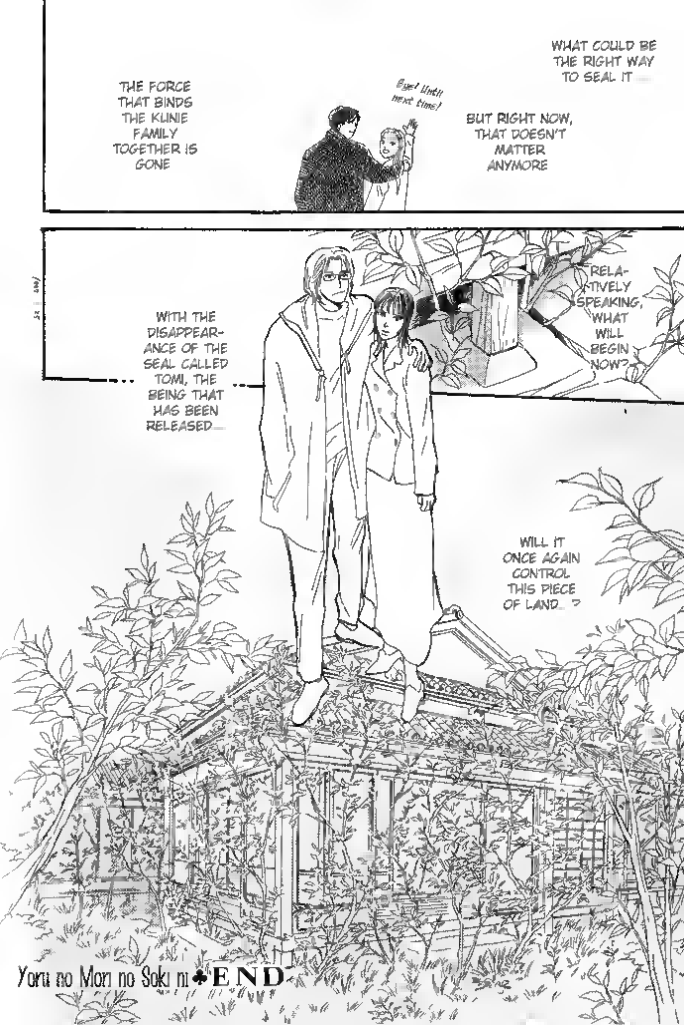
RUMBLE
RUM
WHAT...
WHAT IS THIS?
RUM
THUNDER FROM THE GROUND?
OH!
JUST NOW... WHAT WAS THAT?
... SHE'S GONE...

TOMI'S SPIRIT...
HAS DISAP-PEARED.
TOMI WAS LEFT...


MESSED THINGS UP ONCE AGAIN
PERHAPS WE'VE


SINCE WE BURNT THE DOLL USED TO SEAL TOMI'S SOUL...
AND TOMI'S SPIRIT WAS RELEASED...
PERHAPS THAT WAS WHAT TOMI HAS BEEN LONGING FOR THE MOST
HOWEVER, NOW THAT THE FORCE THAT HAD CONTROLLED THE FAMILY IS GONE...
EVEN THOUGH IT'S HARD TO SEE,
THE KUNIE FAMILY HAS ALREADY STARTED TO CRUMBLE

I THINK THE OUTCOME IS QUITE NICE...
Don't be sarcastic! It was our fault!
The house sure has fallen apart quickly...
IT HAS ALREADY BEEN DECIDED THAT THE ENTIRE HOUSE WILL BE TORN DOWN NEXT MONTH
AFTER THE FAMILY MEMBERS LEFT, THE MAIN HOUSE AND ITS FOUNDATION STARTED TO CRUMBLE
NOW EVERYONE CAN RELY ON THEIR OWN ABILITIES, AND ARE FREE TO DO WHATEVER THEY WANT TO.
AKIRA AND YURIKO ARE NOW LIVING TOGETHER
Plus they're gotten used to living in an apartment
MOM AND THE OTHERS LOOK SO RELIEVED, LIKE WHATEVER'S BEEN POSSESSING THEM HAS FINALLY BEEN EXORCISED
IS THIS REALLY GOOD?
ATSUSHI OFTEN VISITS ME AT MY PLACE
I'VE ALSO STARTED LIVING ON MY OWN IN AN APARTMENT
I ALSO FEEL RELIEVED
WHAT IF SOMETHING ELSE UNDERGROUND HAS ALSO GOTTEN LOOSE
AFTER RELEASING TOMI
THE THING THAT WAS SEALED BY TOMI'S SOUL
SOMETHING THAT IS EVEN MORE POWERFUL
PERHAPS TOMI HERSELF WAS A "LISTENER" RELAYING ITS MESSAGES TO PEOPLE?

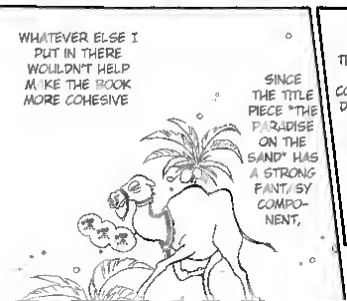

WHAT COULD BE THE RIGHT WAY TO SEAL IT
THE FORCE THAT BINDS THE KUNIE FAMILY TOGETHER IS GONE
Bye! Until next time!
BUT RIGHT NOW, THAT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE
RELATIVELY SPEAKING, WHAT WILL BEGIN NOW?
WITH THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SEAL CALLED TOMI, THE BEING THAT HAS BEEN RELEASED
WILL IT ONCE AGAIN CONTROL THIS PIECE OF LAND...?
Yoru no Mori no Soki ni END

Extra
Time Capsule

Special Thanks

HONAMI TAKATOH
HIDEKO FUKUSHI
YURI WATANABE
RUI HASHIMOTO

THE PUBLISHER HAS DECIDED TO PUBLISH A COLLECTION OF MY SHORT STORIES.
Editor Y Tamura
Hmm
THE STORIES INCLUDED WILL BE "THE PARADISE ON THE SAND", "AT THE BOTTOM OF THE NIGHT FOREST", AND "LET IT RAIN".
HOWEVER, THAT ISN'T ENOUGH PAGES.
List


WHATEVER ELSE I PUT IN THERE WOULDN'T HELP MAKE THE BOOK MORE COHESIVE
SINCE THE TITLE PIECE "THE PARADISE ON THE SAND" HAS A STRONG FANTASY COMPONENT,

EACH STORY'S THEME WAS ALREADY COMPLETELY DIFFERENT
Hmm
PLEASE PICK ANOTHER ONE OR TWO PIECES
Four Short Stories From N Years Ago

There is also something that you couldn't bear to read...
JUST LIKE THAT IT COULD BE MADE INTO A BOOK!
THE PROTAGONISTS ARE ALL GIRLS
I FINALLY FOUND SOMETHING IN COMMON BETWEEN THEM...
I SELECTED "I WANT TO TRAVEL" SINCE...
AFTER THINKING REALLY HARD
BUT HAVING TO EDIT AND CORRECT THESE MANGA, WHICH I DIDN'T EVER WANT TO SEE AGAIN -- NOW THAT'S INCREDIBLY PAINFUL
OF COURSE, I'M VERY HAPPY TO HAVE A MANGA PUBLISHED...
SINCE THERE'S NO WAY OUT OF IT, I HAVE TO OPEN THE ENVELOPE SENT TO ME CONTAINING THE EDITED AND PROOFED SCRIPT...
Asahi
THEN I ALSO DISCOVERED THAT
Oh...
THE PROTAGONIST IN "THE PARADISE ON THE SAND" ISN'T A GIRL
It should really be Aoiam
Oh so it that kind of a story!!
Time Capsule +END
96
Happy New Year!
OH! SORRY MR. K!
Thank you for the New Years card.
I DISCOVERED THAT THERE WAS ALSO A NEW YEAR'S CARD FROM ONE AND A HALF YEARS AGO IN IT.